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HOW TO ENJOY THE COUNTRYSIDE

BY
MARCUS WOODWARD

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HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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General Preface

THE object of HODDER AND STOUGHTON'S PEOPLE'S LIBRARY is to supply in brief form simply written introductions to the study of History, Literature, Biography and Science ; in some degree to satisfy that ever-increasing demand for knowledge which is one of the happiest characteristics of our time. The names of the authors of the first volumes of the Library are sufficient evidence of the fact that each subject will be dealt with authoritatively, while the authority will not be of the "dry-as-dust" order. Not only is it possible to have learning without tears, but it is also possible to make the acquiring of knowledge a thrilling and entertaining adventure. HODDER AND STOUGHTON'S PEOPLE'S LIBRARY will, it is hoped, supply this adventure.

*Made and Printed in Great Britain.
R. Clay & Sons, Ltd., Printers, Bungay, Suffolk.*

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A true guide to the enjoyment of the countryside will presently lead the way to a farmyard, always a place of high attraction to the student of all things rural, and especially to the observer of wild life. The domestic creatures are a lure to their wild brethren. In winter, the stackyard gives shelter and food to a multitude, and sparrow-hawks come swooping on the hungry bands of finches. Every night may come a fox, with admirable perseverance seeking the chance, which will surely come to him one night, of taking fowl or duck. The farmyard has its seven ages in a year much like those of a man's life; and the last age is likely to be such a tragi-comedy as to make a visitor both weep and laugh.

It is always pleasant to wander about the old barnyard. For first greeting there is the watchdog's honest bark as you pass the farmhouse. Poor old Rover spends his life at the end of a short chain, his life that consists of eating, drink-

ing, sleeping, rushing furiously to the end of his tether till he is pulled up with a neck-breaking jerk, and, more than all, of barking. Yet he has a sense of humour, and knows how to amuse himself. He buries bones and re-discovers them. He pretends to be asleep, to tempt the chickens to peck at the crumbs of his biscuits, so that he may send them flying helter-skelter—a rare joke. Sometimes he falls asleep while pretending, and a rat steals out from the barn to make off with his biscuit.

For the children there is no happier playground than the old barnyard. Every rural child revels in a hayloft, with its happy hayhills, whereon they climb and toboggan by the hour. And then there is the heart-quaking pleasure of opening just a little way the door where the great bull is stalled, to look fearfully at his magnificence, and meet the baleful glance of his limpid eyes as the short, strong neck is turned. And then there is the fun of calling in the cows, and watching the milking and hearing the music of the milk pattering into the pail.

In the days preceding Christmas the farmyard

pulsates with life, and all the creatures wear a look of fat contentment. Though they live that they may be sacrificed in the end, their days, one supposes, pass serenely. But as Christmas draws on, ominous events happen. One fine day the turkeys find themselves made prisoners in a small shed, where, as they may or may not observe, they grow speedily fatter on the plentiful meals supplied. And then six fine cocks at one fell swoop find themselves taken prisoners, to their amazed indignation. Alas, poor birds of dawning! Pitiably they thrust their necks through the wooden bars of their cage. There is only one good point about their captivity; they are better fed than before. They do their best to show an unconquerable spirit. Hard as it is to observe the swaggering gait put on by their despicable rival, the bantam cock, as he passes the prison, they crow defiance, daring him to come on. They speak their minds to their mistresses. But the old note of assurance has a quaver.

A feature of Christmas at the farm is holiday sport among rabbits and rats. Custom of the

country ordains that every countryman with a right to carry a gun must have a shot at the rabbits, and many without a right will do likewise. Sport of some sort there must be, if only a day's ratting. Boxing-Day ferreting is an old-established institution; the day is a black one for rabbits, and ferrets too.

There is a Sussex farm where the Master of Ceremonies on these occasions is a venerable bailiff, since time out of mind the leader at Christmas of a motley crew of rustic sportsmen. As he leads his merry men down the village street, half the boys of the place fall in to heel. Those without guns are armed with sticks, spades, crowbars, or nets. The scene of operations is a big rabbits' warren at the foot of the Downs. Holes are netted, ferrets put in, and any rabbits not too terrified by the mighty uproar which goes on bolt to their doom, if not to be netted or shot, to be taken by dogs, or run down. The everlasting wonder of the day is that any sportsman survive. Legs are peppered in plenty, and some lively language comes from the old bailiff as shot rattles against

his time-honoured smock, or against the great thigh-leggings which encase him like armour.

Any day about Christmas you may come upon the bailiff—a hearty old man who calls everyone “My boy,” regardless of age and rank—standing on one side of a wide hedge, with his son George on the other side, his ferrets in the hedgebank, and his shepherd, another venerable figure, standing in the ditch to act as “stop.” If George happens to pepper his respected parent’s smock, “My boy, you be more careful-like,” roars the old man, but next moment is letting drive with both barrels at once, and well peppering George’s legs in return. Unrepentant, he loads again, as a rabbit bolts up the ditch, heading straight for the shepherd. Once more both barrels blaze, as the shepherd springs for life up the bank, and the rabbit races up the now-clear course of the ditch. “Why don’t ye stand still, my boy?” roars the bailiff. And so the sport goes on, and the marvel is that the bailiff, his son, and the shepherd, a boy of sixty summers at least, have lived to enjoy many such days at Christmastide.

When on Christmas Eve we visit the farmyard, there is no sign of the late cocks of the dunghill—their problems are solved, and the wind is whistling round them as they hang, with red rosettes about their naked necks, outside the butcher's shop. And a sorrowful change has come over all the once-glad, gobbling farmyard scene. The watchdog's honest bark rings out in savage welcome as of yore, but where are his rival sentinels and guards, the raucous-voiced geese? They too are stripped naked, and mockingly ornamented, in place of fine feathers, with red and blue ribbons and rosettes, and hang head-downwards in full view of passers-by in the village street, and anyone may poke them in the ribs.

And now, on Christmas Day, the little despised bantam takes the morning roll-call. The roll is called, but few answer "Here, sir!": the watchdog's bark proclaims the missing as "Absent—absent!" Gone are the geese that survived Michaelmas; absent are all the dandy turkeys. Who knows?—some of the old friends may yet meet at a Christmas board, in positively their last appearance on the mortal stage. All

that remain to answer the roll-call are a few old warrior roosters, too tough for any table, with a few old wives and thin turkeys, sole remnants of the once-glorious turkey brigade. The others have danced by now the last strange ballet of the barnyard fowls, that upside-down ballet nowhere seen to more advantage, as a mocking commentary on the vanity of life, than in Leadenhall Market. The bantam is the proudest creature. The late cocks would turn in their graves, if they had them, to hear his vain-glorious crowing from the topmost peak of the dunghill. . . .

A golden key to the enjoyment of many a woodland is the goodwill of a gamekeeper. To meet a keeper in the woods may sometimes be embarrassing ; but if he prove in kindly and communicative mood, he will surely afford a new thought or two of woodland life, and may show us something we should not see without his help—nest of pheasant, hawk, or crow ; the picture of fox-cubs asleep or at their gambols. A certain romance clings about the keeper ; a charm invests his work, one suggested by the word woodcraft : so that he is an outstanding character among rural worthies, one who commands respect in a countryside, and often proves a kindly guide to the secret places of the woods.

COULD there be any happier lot for a boy of sporting stock than to have the run of broad manorial acres, and the friendship of a gamekeeper?—one ever ready to show him—“and welcome”—every secret of his woods, from those olive-green eggs of his sacred pheasants to the

eggs of hawks, crows, or magpies, or the picture of fox-cubs playing at the mouth of their den. Most country boys, being chips of sporting blocks, envy the keeper his life and his accomplishments : such as his art of calling rabbits from their holes by sucking the back of his hand, luring jays to within gun-shot, or imitating the scream of a snared hare. That a keeper of the old school had many such accomplishments may be gathered from this description of a Sussex worthy, found in the note-book of a country parson, written upwards of a hundred years ago : “ He could imitate the notes of almost all birds—it was worth while to sit near and hear him take off the challenge of an old cock pheasant, the call of the partridge, of the quail especially, and the landrail. No Spanish quail-call of ivory and green leather could match his imitation. Then again he could rival the thin wiry squeak of the weasel, and bark like a fox ; and it is said that he has waked the dormouse from his sleep before his time by taking off his little husky bark, which few have heard, except those who have lived in the woods, and were observers of Nature.”

The landrail and quail were commonly mentioned together by our sporting fathers; alas! they are rare birds to-day, the quail for the reason that we prefer it should find its way to Leadenhall Market rather than to our meadows in May. The keeper of the old school grows a rare bird, too—like the old-time poacher, to whom knocking birds off their roosts afforded such true delight

On a shiny night,
In the season of the year.

Now and then a keeper of the old type is found in retirement on the estate, where he may do odd jobs, like sweeping up leaves on the Squire's drives; or he may turn woodman, and keep the rides in good order; more probably he will invest his savings in some snug public-house, with a garden which allows him to add a little to the small profits from selling beer in the country. The keeper is always as skilled in rearing vegetables as pheasants; he is the man to win prizes at the local shows of cottage-garden produce, and this is in accordance with the respect with which he is held in the country—where a man is known by his garden. It was an

axiom of the country parson, "A good gardener was a good subject and a good parishioner."

The gamekeeper in retirement is known at a glance from other men; his dress betrays him, and the way his eyes are continually directed skywards, marking the passage of hawk or pigeon. A picture comes to mind of one old keeper in retirement, whose blue eyes, under beetling brows, and above a nose like a hawk's beak, were growing dim, who was employed on a very odd job, one which went sorely against the grain, the sowing of gorse on the downs for fox-coverts. While he worked, those dimming eyes saw every bird that flew, and would gaze long at the red shadow of a fox slinking down the valley. There was a time when the sight would have brought a curse to his lips, and his gun to his shoulder. But in his old age he was a philosopher. All he would say was, "'Tis a wurruld of trouble, surelye!"—implying thereby that in his youth he never could have imagined that in old age he would be sowing gorse-seed for Charley—he would never mention the fox by any other name.

To meet a gamekeeper in the woods may not always be what one would wish; but such a meeting—the situation, if critical, being handled delicately—is sure to result in a new thought to be carried away about the wild life of the woods. He reads signs in woodland glades that tell stories as clearly as the printed word: how here a stoat sprang for a rabbit, and the two rolled over; how a cat passed this way in the night, or Charley went that way; how a hare, rushing headlong to her favourite gap, side-slipped, winding danger ahead (see the slashing side-stroke of her off hind-leg in the mud) and turned off at right angles, quick as thought. The keeper is as good a judge of a man as of the speed of driven partridges, or the way a fox will run when roused by the horn. He would give you the character of every man in the village. The poacher may be as clever, and it may be years before he is brought to book, but the keeper has the art of biding his time. He is sometimes wrong in his judgments on birds, and nearly always is marvellously ignorant about birds not included in his comprehensive term

"varmint," but is rarely at fault in judging a man, or a woman either.

A boy cannot but envy him his woodland cottage, with the wild life all about him, and the peace of the woods. The keeper is a poor man, with wages scarcely better than an agricultural labourer's, though he may be responsible for the spending of many thousands of pounds; but he is often rich in contentment, and he loves the life, and his position, held honestly, is one which commands the respect of all the countryside. A boy envies the keeper's routine of work, though the keeper's own boy leads what one described as a fetch-and-carry life. Of the beginning of this career it is more true to say that the gamekeeper is born, not made, than of most careers, as he is usually the son of a gamekeeper, as a huntsman usually comes from hunt-servant stock. There is work in the rearing-field that is monotonous and heavy, but the seasons bring their varied employments, and the keeper's boy must be a dull dog if he does not feel something of the spell of woodcraft investing his calling.

February sees the foundation of the year's

work laid, the catching up of pheasants for stock, and the opening of the annual campaign against vermin. The keeper's aim is to clear his ground of vermin before the birds begin to lay, and since stoats and weasels have families, to kill one of such highwaymen in March is much the same as killing ten in June. Everlasting trouble is the keeper's lot if he neglects trapping, and his labour will bring its own reward. So we see him setting forth with an old feed-bag stuffed with the traps that were put aside for the winter. Besides the ground vermin, he pays attention to the crow, the magpie, the jay and the sparrowhawk, and others on his black list, and rabbits are likely to find themselves the objects of his attention, while February and March are dangerous months to poaching cats. April brings the blessed moment when the keeper finds the first of his wild pheasants' eggs. Searching the April coverts for the nests of the wild birds is perhaps his pleasantest task of the year, but it ushers in the rearing-season, when he will have never a moment to call his soul his own.

Through all these heavy days of toil, until the

young birds can care for themselves, and learn the habit of going to roost in trees, the keeper almost gives up home life. Haymaking and harvesting bring him anxious days. For a month or two past he has seen little of his wild birds, the luxuriant growth of the woodlands, hedgerows, meadows and cornfields hiding all things feathered and furred. Corn, the natural summer home of pheasant and partridge, keeps its secrets well. So at harvest-time we note the quiet watchful figure of the keeper taking stock of all game flushed by the reapers. If he sees two or three coveys flushed, he always hopes there may be two or three more unseen. When the fields begin to be cleared, you note him, dog at heel, making the round of the farms on the estate, and prospecting root-fields, taking stock of the coveys. The First is a welcome day to the keeper; a quiet opening day may be one of the most enjoyable in the year. Harvest-fields are nearly cleared; young pheasants have passed through their critical time, and are learning to go to roost at night: the keeper looks forward to the garnering of his own harvest. By now

he has surveyed his beat, and knows where the coveys are to be found—and where he wishes them to go when flushed: where he does not wish them to go is over the boundary. Long-net poachers are to be expected. But as the shooting season goes on, some of the keeper's heaviest anxieties pass away: his chief one is, that his birds shall show sport. On frosty nights, he listens to the crowing of the pheasants as they go to roost, and reckons how many are left. The pheasant poacher may give trouble, though the poaching profession is not what it was: there is sure to be some attempt to net gateways for hares, to set snares in the tracks of pheasants leaving the coverts, to net them in the clover, or to risk a shot as they roost. The Christmas holidays come; and then the keeper may take what he calls "the young entry" in hand, boys home from school: a great sportsman, he thinks that the more young sportsmen he can help, so much the better for game, for gamekeepers, and for the old country.

To be out in the fields at sunrise in February is to see many a picture missing from the day of those not given to what the Persians call dew-brushing. Then the night-hunters, going home, meet the birds of dawning, as in late autumn incoming fieldfares from northern forests arrive in time to see the swallows as they set sail southwards. Seven o'clock of a February morning finds the world a very different place from the four-o'clock-in-the-morning world of June ; but there is in February more of hope and promise in the dawn, as the missel-thrush rings up Spring's curtain.

SEVEN o'clock, and a fine morning, late in February : half a moon, her face turned eastward, reflects the sun, still below the horizon. In dawn's twilight, the night-hunters are heard going home. In the copse at the outskirts of the village a fox barks, three short, sharp, dry, yapping barks at a time, then a pause ; and now and then comes the answering squall of a

vixen. In the dim light the owls seek shelter, and the shrieks they give as they reach the church tower is the signal for the outbreak of cockcrow. There is an owl whom the cocks in turn may call, the diurnal "little owl," almost unknown in many countrysides before the War, now abounding in such numbers that we wonder how they find enough tree-holes for their nests.

As morning breaks, the larks go up, singing by moonshine before there is sunshine. The man going out with the plough-team hears the lark; but all in the village hear the missel-thrush. A little before seven he starts his matins, and his far-flung notes must be cheerful hearing to many a woman kneeling before a fire. As he sings in the morning dusk from the top of a sombre yew ("rarely pipes the mounted thrush") one thinks of him as a muezzin crying from some tower of darkness. Or he is the bugler that wakes the Sleeping Beauty; at his urgent notes, drowsy night-watchmen, like the bats, awake from long sleep to hawk through the village, and messengers, like brimstone butterflies, set forth on urgent errands.

Going down the lane, the whitethorn hedge is seen each morning to be putting on fresh green livery. More and more leaves of the lords-and-ladies push out of the bank, some blotched all over as if Puck had splashed them with fairy ink. Where the lane runs into the field is a holly-bush still laden with crimson berries; a pigeon clatters off. In the meadow are a thousand fieldfares feeding and their throaty chuckle makes a strange chorus to greet the sun. This mild morning they may well be dreaming of their nest-trees in far Scandinavia, but they will stay for weeks yet, their time for departure being that for the swallows to arrive. Suddenly the fieldfares' notes change to cries of alarm, as a sparrow-hawk goes skimming along the hedge, and he does not miss his mark when he makes his swift swoop. The fieldfares are reckoned to be vigilant birds, but are not so wide awake as one in a tree at the end of the hedge, whistling shrilly, and making strange sounds which suggest that he is mocking them. "Koowit, koowit, koowit," he whistles—it is the note of the day-flying owl. He is as good a sentinel as the

vigilant wren, or the redshank, and is certain to give the alarm if any rook or jay approaches his tree. The wary fieldfares take no heed of a stranger advancing up the hedge, but the little owl has given them fair warning from the moment the field was entered. Also he gave warning to some rabbits in a sandpit where he has his lodging; should any man with a gun go to the pit for a rabbit at daybreak, the owl's whistle sends all the rabbits to cover. "Koowit!" he whistles, watching the enemy in the hedge. "Tcha-tcha-tcha!" chuckle the still-unsuspecting fieldfares, as who should say, "Morning's at seven. All's right with the world."

The rooks think so too; the rookery is an uproarious place at dawn, and the wood rings with wild cawings as the birds swoop madly about the tree-tops, in a veritable spring fever, with frantic eagerness pruning the old elms, their strong bills ruthlessly tearing twigs from the living tree. The business-like way in which some pairs set about putting an old nest to rights and lining it with grass suggests they are old hands. And it may be observed that the experienced builders

are not robbed like the neophytes, whose 'prentice nests are so often raided and destroyed. There is something ludicrous about so solemn-looking a bird as the rook cutting love-capers. But he is an ardent lover when the spring fever mounts. Now when a colony feeds in a meadow it may be observed that they march in pairs. Then the courtier rook is seen bowing and scraping before his chosen one, though she may have been his faithful mate through twenty years. It is his pleasure to press tit-bits of grubs and worms into her beak—she meantime fluttering her wings, as if she were an innocent baby rook yet in the wicker cradle. When a rook flies to his mate with his beak crammed with food for her delectation he utters a comical parody of a caw in trying to announce his approach. Like the rooks, the jackdaws fly in pairs, and wherever one drifts on the wings of fancy the other follows. The daws of a chalk-pit spend all the lengthening days in prospecting for nesting-sites along the cliffs, and the air resounds with their cawing at dawn, a never-ceasing love-plaint.

It is three weeks before the day when the good

Bishop Valentine will proclaim the wedding-time of the birds, but betrothal-time is ushered in by the first mild January day. It is remarkable what human-like passions of jealousy and hate become manifest among partridges when the coveys begin to break into pairs, and, with the dawn of the courting season, they become involved in quarrels and battles royal. Since the June before the covey may have been an harmonious family party, brother and sister birds ever amicably side by side, huddled close for warmth and protection o' nights. But the family may not be evenly paired, and the bachelor who finds himself odd-bird-out will prove a disturbing element. As January goes on, the young birds begin to pair off, while still feeding, drinking, dusting, roaming and flying as a party; in couples they go, gradually drawing apart from the others. If the early-riser—the "dew-brusher"—disturbs them in the fields at daybreak, he may note how at night the birds of a pair have kept side by side. At last comes the day when each pair goes its own way, and henceforward will lead lives as one. Early in

the morning of the day of disbanding they are seen to be in high fettle, chasing one another, sparring, fighting, darting, dancing, and diving about, cutting all manner of capers. A spell of cold weather will damp this ardour.

The same ardour inspires the wood-pigeon whose crooning is so pleasant a note among the early songs of the year, suggestive of all things spring-like; the courtier bird becomes ever more lustrous in his plumage, the picture of a bird-bridegroom, shining in his strength. The ritual of the courting is almost as fantastic as the love-rites of blackcock. There is something comical in the way the love-sick pigeon bobs and sidles along a branch towards his chosen one, ducking the head and flirting the tail until at last bill touches bill; then he sails away, with a smart clapping of wings, to soar, hover, and glide.

Going through the fields at dawn, the courting rites of the wanton lapwings will make another taking picture, as they tumble and twirl in the air, and swoop on one another, in frolic or fray. Fancy being captured, one is seen strutting on the ground alongside his enchanter, his head

down, his crest and tail erect. For all his round wings, when a lapwing is courting, and rises fifty yards into the air, he zigzags downwards with a speed hardly matched even by the birds that live in the air, flashing to the ground, and as he twirls and tumbles, he may actually turn over on his back. He is a sleepless bird, and his pretty frolics may be observed on moonlight nights, as if his ardour will never let him rest, though morning's at seven.

To know the voices of the birds is among the simplest and surest ways to the enjoyment of the countryside. A peculiar charm invests the first-heard notes of the bird-heralds of spring and summer—and winter. The day is red-lettered to the naturalist when he hears his first chiffchaff of March, wryneck of April (heralding cuckoo), or turtle-dove of May—or the throaty chuckle of the fieldfare in the days when the swallows go. Country people listen at least for the cuckoo's first call, knowing no other true harbinger of Spring: crocus and daffodil are false prophets, and there is no truth in the calendar. Like the troubadour of old, he comes with a tale.

THE bird of March is not the sea-blue one, but a slender little olive-green warbler from Africa, the chiffchaff, the first of the singing migrants of spring to come to the south country. It comes in a vast multitude, as numberless as motes

in sunbeams; this must be so, for from mid-March to October the note is to be heard (though falling mostly on deaf ears) in every garden, meadow and wood—"Chiff-chaff—chiff-chaff." It is the simplest of all the warblers' songs—just the two notes, uttered in a spirited style, repeated several times without pause, and ringing out like a quiet bell. It sings its own name, the "chaff" note a trifle accentuated, but sometimes the notes run into one another as the little bird grows excited in pursuit of its mate, or as it works over trees and bushes, prospecting for caterpillars, greenfly, moths, flies and other game.

The chiffchaff's notes are among the most welcome of the year, since it braves the gales of March to tell a story of good hope. They are known to the country children, who have quaint fancies about the birds. They say of the great tit's two notes that they are like the sound of the village blacksmith's hammer, with which it keeps time and tune. They say the chaffinch sings, "Will you, will you kiss me, dear?"; and, on hearing the chiffchaff, remark, "He is counting his money." The idea is approved by the chiff-

chaff's scientific name, *Collybita*, the Money-changer. The notes suggest the chinking of gold pieces. In poetic fancy, the bird is counting the money that will pay its passage on its voyage, a long reckoning, as it is the first of the delicate leaf-warblers, and the latest to go. Like robin and willow-wren, it utters at times a pathetic, "weeping" note, as though the reckoning had gone wrong.

With its cousins, willow-wren and wood-warbler, the chiffchaff makes up a charming trio of warblers: the willow-wren, whose little song is so sweet a cadence, running down the scale like a chime of silvery bells, clashing out and dying away—repeated again and again, at eight-second intervals, through the livelong day—and the rarer wood-warbler, with its tremulous song and canary-like trill. This is often uttered on the wing, the notes quickening and growing louder as the fairy-like form flutters across a woodland glade to its anchorage.

The chiffchaff is always known by its note, but there are other signs of identity; it has a browner look than the brighter olive-green

willow-wren (well-named from its love of willows) and the legs are darker than its cousin's. Year after year it returns faithfully to the same nesting-place, and the cock bird sings from the heights of a favourite tree while the hen warms her six brown-spotted, fragile eggs in her wonderful domed nest, set almost on the ground, or in a clump of bracken or heather, often marvellously matching surroundings. It comes to us in the days of wood-violets and anemones; when the willows are in bloom, and murmurous with bees; when the chaffinch obliges with the prelude of the birds' spring chorus with a homely, merry song, always the same—never a note out of place; when the brimstone butterfly is abroad, when the flowering elms are wine-hued, and the cumulus galleons float aloft. All the magic of spring is in its two notes. They are the music to which those little wild daffodils dance, token of the sweet o' the year.

Like the troubadour, the wryneck "cometh to you with a tale." Its high, clear, hawk-like note, when heard for the first time in a year, early in April, is a prophecy. It suggests ideas,

as White of Selborne said of the cricket's song, of "everything that is rural, verdurous, and joyous." The definite prophecy is that the cuckoo is coming, but that high note stands for many other things to minds attuned to Nature's moods. To one it will express the very spirit of an early spring day; to another it is harmonious with a day of late June, when the mowing-grass is tinged with sorrel red, and as you take the footpath way you hear the wryneck calling high in an elm. Country children hail the shy little bird as the merry "pee-bird," and no doubt its note strikes some responsive chord in their hearts, as they go "primrosing" and "violeting."

Presumably the wryneck was more abundant formerly than now; certainly it was more common in Sussex, always a favourite haunt, in the days before the great forests were cleared for the iron-works. It is always a sign with a bird, as with a flower, that it is a prime favourite when it is called by many provincial names, and the wryneck's are legion—cuckoo's mate or messenger, snake-bird, rinding-bird, tongue-bird, and emmet-hunter. Its usual English name is derived from

the snake-like way it twists its neck, hence "snake-bird," and its scientific name *torquilla* is repeated in the French *tor col*. It is remarkable that so retired and plain-hued a bird should have taken so great a hold on popular imagination. Ears deaf to the songs of willow-wren or wood-wren are pricked at the wryneck's call, and a wealth of anecdote clings to the caller; how it hisses like a snake if disturbed on the nest, with writhing neck, and how, if taken in hand, it feigns death until the hold be released, a ruse known to the landrail. Rinding-bird is a significant name. A Sussex woodman spoke of it as "flooring bird," showing how persistently its association with forestry lingers on. The name enshrines the notion that the wryneck appears in the spring at the proper time for felling trees, and rinding the bark, work that cannot be attempted until the sap begins to flow. Then the insects begin to stir, and the wryneck, on arrival, at once sets to work to extract them with its elastic tongue, over two inches long, covered with sticky matter, that flashes in and out with unerring aim. So the hawk-like cry

gives a message of good news to the woodmen, while proclaiming the cuckoo's advent to all.

The note is so high-pitched and ringing that it carries a distance of a quarter-of-a-mile, one reiterated note that suggests the words to which the children fit it, "pee-pee-pee," or "qui-qui-qui," a note like a kestrel's or a hobby's. Seen at close quarters the finely-chequered plumage of the bird suggests the pattern of a fritillary's wings, or the mottled plumage of the nightjar. The delicate markings are an example of the pleasing effects of blending simple browns, greys, and yellowish-white hues. There is a suggestion of exquisite pencilling on the breast. When perched on a tree-trunk, picking out its prey, the bird's attitudes make an entertaining study, especially the way the head and neck are turned in all directions, "wryly" moving from side to side, with snake-like motion. And while this twisting goes on, there are bowing and scraping postures of the body, the tail is flirted, and odd sounds come from the throat. Anger being aroused, the feathers of the head go up expressively, and then the sinister hissing is heard. Most interesting is

the picture made by the wryneck engaged in its favourite occupation of attacking an ant-heap. With its bill it goes to work, like the green woodpecker, in an energetic way, stirring up the colony, and then the retractile tongue is seen flicking in and out for ants and their eggs.

In a garden where nesting-boxes are provided for titmice and nuthatches the wryneck is not altogether a welcome tenant, for it shows a marked jealousy of other birds' nesting-holes. One will return to a garden for years in succession, to drive the tits from their boxes. But we forgive it much for the faithful way it comes back, to lay its glossy white eggs in its apology for a nest in the same breeding-hole, whether in a box or in a decaying apple-tree. We never tire of watching so singular a bird, in appearance and habit so unlike any other. Its loud cry rings cheerfully through the garden in April, and we often hear it while the cuckoo is calling in accordance with the traditional association of cuckoo and cuckoo's mate.

Hearing the first call of the cuckoo, on an April day, one may think: "Here comes the most-

maligned bird in the world." Its very name stands for all that is mean and sneaking. The cuckoo despoils nests, steals eggs, shirks the duties of parenthood, and foists its young on others. Its chicks are murderers when still blind and naked, and no more than a day old, when they eject and kill the rightful heirs to the nest. They grow up as pariahs. Many people strongly dislike the cuckoo's call, because of its monotony, and because it calls at break of day, keeping honest men awake. Some describe it as the most hateful note in Nature. As to the female cuckoo, she is shameless, and flies about with a retinue of husbands.

But one can find some eight or nine good words to say for cuckoos. And first it is to be noted that small song-birds are proud of the egg the cuckoo entrusts to their care. If they mob the cuckoo as it prowls about their nests, prospecting, this is only in accordance with an instinct to mob any large bird; and perhaps even in their eyes the cuckoo wears a sinister, hawk-like look. Once the egg is safe in the nest, they cherish it. And they are prouder still of the ugly foundling

when hatched. If it ejects their own young they seem to show no distress, callously regarding the corpses of the chicks as they come and go to succour their destroyer.

The cuckoo cannot build a nest if it would. Is it to be blamed because Nature denied it the nesting instinct? It never knows what home means—"Thy children like olive plants round about thy table," etc.). So the cuckoo has a heavy cross to bear, and in this may deserve our sympathy.

There are parts of the country which have their official cuckoos, first heard about the same time each year, and if other cuckoos happen to be shouting their names to the hills beforehand, they are reckoned as unofficial vagrants, of no account: thus it is at Heathfield—"Heffle," as one should say—that pleasant Sussex village where lives the traditional old woman, who in April is always ready to catch and then release the first cuckoo of the spring. Sussex recognises no cuckoo which comes before Heffle Cuckoo Fair, the village's old woman is the one and only authentic liberator, who gives the word,

"Great Ver is born." And she never fails in her duty, let spring come up our way never so slowly, and no Sussex man hears his first cuckoo at the right time without a kindly thought of the old woman. And those of us who believe in the story are no more to be laughed at than others who choose to believe that the cuckoo of spring becomes the sparrow-hawk of winter, a thing more easy to credit than the theory of migration : how can young cuckoos find their way alone to Africa if it be true that the parents go long before the young are ready for the voyage? Certainly the cuckoo is a bird of mystery.

The first cuckoo's call perhaps means more to country people than any other bird's first-heard note. The cuckoo calls for good hope. A pilgrim in a countryside, when the cuckoo first comes, may observe how all sorts of people will turn their heads to follow its long, bluish-grey, hawk-like form, how they pause in their affairs as they first hear the welcome, twofold shout, each one saying in his own way, "Sumer is icumen in." Passing over a hamlet the cuckoo gives a message to every soul. April showers are due after

Blackthorn Winter; swallows soon will be fly-fishing again over the hayfields; the nightingale cannot be far away. One thinks of the old tale in the "Shepherd's Week," how a certain maid, hearing her first cuckoo of April "call with welcome note the budding spring," straightway set off running, until she could run no longer, then, resting on a bank, doffed her shoe, and spied there a yellow frizzled hair, "As like to Lubberkin's in curl and hue, as if upon his comely pate it grew;" so that she was sure of her Lubberkin's love. The cuckoo still has a message for your true lovers.

Spring's major heralds have their minor ones; as the wryneck is the cuckoo's boder, the dusky little sand-martins are the pioneers of the swallow hosts. The shepherd of the downs has a sign, when he observes the first migrant bird of the year, the white-rumped wheatear, that through spring and summer will keep him company. The angler's herald is the sandpiper. A farmer's prophet is the barley-bird (yellow-wagtail) that comes to proclaim the time of spring sowings. On moorlands of the south-west and far north the

ring-ousel is chief of minor prophets. There are marshmen who wait to hear the redshanks whistle their well-known triple note for the certain sign of spring's real presence.

The happy name Spring Usher might have been bestowed on many a bird and flower, but is the right of a lowly moth that haunts oak-woods, sitting, somewhat disconsolately, on tree-trunks. It is the bell-wether of moths, spring's true insect harbinger. We may suppose its life to have been more enviable in its caterpillar stage, when it knew the oak in its time of leafing, and heard, though it trembled perhaps at the sound, the voice of Philomel. Still, this lowly footman of spring may have some mild joy in life, as it basks in March sunshine. Nature has ordained that the females of the harbinger moths shall be wingless, for their greater safety. One of the first to find the rule relaxing is the Small Eggar, in early spring forcing a way from the hard, seamless cocoon its caterpillar fashioned, a feat that is almost a miracle. This moth also is among the minor spring prophets.

But behold a brighter herald, one to whom,

as we cannot doubt, is given a sense of spring fever as it stirs from winter sleep, to take the air on its primrose wings—the brimstone butterfly, singular among its kind for the long life it may enjoy in the sun. Hibernators usually are granted but a brief spell in which to mate and lay eggs before passing to their Nirvana. But these joyous sun-worshippers may even live to see their own offspring, since specimens of different years are found on a summer's day. It flies like a primrose that has taken wings, and is sometimes seen on a hedgebank in April, taking refreshment at the Sign of the Primrose, ever the haunt of butterflies, moths and flies, rather than of honey-bees. It is a prime favourite, like the primrose and the robin. If it drifts to a town, its primrose wings bear a message to townsfolk to wake from winter discontent, and follow to the coppices where the white violets are blowing.

And on the primrose bank where the primrose butterfly rests at its floral tavern lurks another minor prophet to give a startling intimation of better days—the adder, newly awakened from

winter sleep. Coiled among the flowers on a sunny mound of the hedgebank, it is a terrifying sight to the innocent primrose-picker. But like the croaking of frogs, and no less than the call of the cuckoo, and the fleet forms of swallows, and all the songs and dipping wings of the April poet, the adder's hiss proclaims, "Old Pan has taken a wife."

The explorer of a country village is likely to find a natural instinct stirring to carry away a memento. A little museum at home of village curios may well serve as a treasure-house of memories of the good days enjoyed in the country. And it adds much to the worth of such "*lares et penates*" if something is known of their age-old history; for all the old implements of rural crafts—the shepherd's crook, the mower's scythe, the hedger's smock, even the gardener's "trug"—no less than such more highly prized curios as Toby-jugs, red-speckled china spaniels, or copper warming-pans—have their legendary lore, and are steeped in human interest.

THE collector of cottage curios, like those fascinating china spaniels with chocolate markings, may feel a qualm of shame in depriving the countryman of his household gods, his *lares et penates*, especially if treasures of price are picked up for

a song. It is a shame to buy a Chippendale chair for five shillings when it is worth five hundred, or a Jacobean chest-of-drawers for forty shillings when it is worth forty pounds. But when I gave an old shepherd ten shillings for his shepherd's bottle—a miniature oaken barrel for his beer, which he no longer carries on his crook, for a good reason—he was the most delighted shepherd in Arcady. He told me that his goodwife had chopped up several old bottles for firewood.

The shepherd's bottle is beautifully fashioned in oak, bound by hoops of iron, and fitted with leathern thongs for its attachment to a crook, or to the hames of horses' collars. Large examples hold three or four quarts. They are usually covered by paint, and may look more attractive if this is scraped off, and the wood polished. In Devon they are still in use. A generation ago, a farmer would keep a number of these kegs for his field-workers, every man taking out his beer or cider to the field. In the Midlands the usual allowance of cider was three quarts, with an extra one at harvest.

A museum could be formed of the antique implements of the shepherd's craft: his sheep-bells, with their different tones, his "hempen homespun" smock, worth about ten pounds if a perfect specimen, and his crook. The melody of the sheep-bells grows rarer on the downs, and it is sad that many of the old sets of bells should have been broken up, for they made one of the most charming and natural kinds of music on earth. Collectors of rustic antiquities are here to blame for robbing the downs of this tuneful music. The sound of the bell is unnatural indoors: it must be heard at a little distance, and mingled with other bells of different tone, and with the wind in the grasses, and the larks' songs, to give its true enchantment. At Pyecombe, on the Brighton road, the blacksmith who of old was far-famed for his shepherds' crooks, produced many good bells, and the secret of their clear tone was the brass he hammered into the iron. A proper old sheep-bell, one wider at the mouth than at the shoulders, made of charcoal iron, is variegated on its surface by big yellow flakes of brass. A set of the bells numbers

twenty, or twenty-one, and they range in tone from a large tenor, six inches across, to a small, high-pitched treble bell. The large ones are the "clucks," and when heard musically tinkling from the necks of the bell-wethers a countryman will say, "Here be they old cluckers."

Any South Down shepherd will tell you that the bells of his sheep are often heard chiming by people at a distance of two miles; one shepherd declares that he once heard the bells of his own flock, on a day when he was obliged to go on a journey, at a distance of between four and five miles. When it was suggested that he heard them in imagination, he maintained stoutly that he had heard them in fact, but it was true he had lately been obliged to reduce the number of the bells from forty to twelve, because their music had begun to be an infliction. Listening as he did to the bells all day, and day after day through a lifetime, with never a holiday, his sleep was disturbed by the way they chimed in his brain at night.

The collector's Pyecombe crooks were made by the blacksmith from old gun-barrels. The

old crooks sometimes have a hollow piece of iron or horn at the handle-end, by which the shepherd could pick up stones if he wished to pelt an officious dog : as David went armed with a sling.

Another implement of the shepherd's craft may be picked up here and there in the country, the old-fashioned dog-tongs, of iron or wood, made on the " lazy-tongs " principle, which were kept in churches for the eviction of sheep-dogs, in the days when they naturally went to church with their masters, in Scotland or Wales. The arms of the tongs would reach out six or seven feet to catch and evict a dog which behaved in an unseemly manner.

Ring-dials are curios belonging also to peasants of a vanished generation, and may occasionally be discovered : rings of brass, like small dog's-collars, with movable inner slides which can be set according to the month of the year. When held against the sun, a beam of light passes through a little orifice, and illuminates the hour as marked on the ring's inner side. Such a dial the fool in the Forest of Arden took from his poke, and, looking on it with lack-lustre eye, said, very

wisely, "It is ten o'clock." The dial usually bore some such inscription as

Set me right, and use me well,
And i ye time to you wil tell.

The shepherd no longer pipes, *à la* Corydon, on oaten reed or wooden whistle, and may almost have forgotten how to make turf sundials, "To carve out dials quaintly, point by point." But within living memory dial-making was a shepherd's pastime, a stick set up in the turf forming a gnomon. Another pastime was the tending of his "shepherd's bush," a thorn so clipped and trimmed that it grew like an oval cup, with a platform on the top as a look-out place. Some shepherds would beguile their time by cutting out steps up the steep escarpment on the downs, always known as "The Shepherd's Steps," and others would pass the long hours by carving their crook-handles, as referred to in Michael Drayton's "Pastorals." With a knife and stick, the shepherd fashioned his sheep-tally, or nick-stick, making a notch on his stick for each score of sheep.

And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

The study of the curious lore of common things leads us into delightful by-paths. The shepherd loves his crook; the woodman feels a sentiment for his trusty old billhook; a mower gives something of his heart to his scythe. A pleasant bit of scythe-lore is that every proper scythe, made after the old-fashioned and time-honoured stroke, is stamped with the initial letter of the day of the week when it was made. Look where the crank broadens to the blade, and the birth-mark is to be seen which gives to each old scythe its individuality. One with the letter "F" or "S" is most respected, as the best scythes are supposed to be those made at the end of the week.

The lore of the smock goes back to the days when it was the peasant's sole garment; seventy years ago it was the labourers' almost invariable dress. Piers Plowman mentions it as a fourteenth-century fashion; Shakespeare knew it: "What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here?" Here and there an old hedger-and-ditcher, or a shepherd, clings to his father's fashion. Even such an important person as a

bailiff is seen as a picturesque figure, in a "chummey," or soft felt hat, or perhaps in a high hat, with a finely-puckered smock draping from his shoulders, his legs encased in high leathern leggings, a brown, tent-like umbrella slung by string over his shoulders; standing weather-proof in the fine old costume, as much an outcome of evolution, and in harmony with the land, as the plough.

When the last Earl of Ashburnham was laid to rest (in the spring of 1924) in the little church in the beautiful valley near Battle where his forbears have slept through centuries, his coffin was borne from the house to the farm-waggon that was the hearse by bearers clad in white smocks. It was in accordance with an old Sussex custom, though the field-labourers' Sunday smock—commonly called a round-frock, or smock-frock—as worn in country churches within memory, was normally a black one, for the reason that bearers at funerals were given new black smocks, and kept them for Sunday wear.

But though the smock is out of vogue among labourers, in spite of being one of the most sensible

garments designed by the wit of man—like the thatch of a cottage, cool in summer and warm in winter, cheap, enduring, light, free, cleaner than an overcoat, washable, and shower-, wind-, dust-, and thorn-proof—many a goodwife in Sussex well knows the fine arts of close or open smocking. With a flourish of white thread, she gives a beautiful puckerment to the back, breast, and wrists. One smock will have a little heart worked at the slit of the neck, or maybe a picture of the Chailey windmill and yew-tree. Some are blue, some dark olive-green, or dark slate, the white round-frocks being kept for high days.

Unlike most manly garments, the round-frock has a most accommodating and feminine lap, as useful to a working-man for carrying things as a petticoat or apron to a woman. It can be taken off in emergency to make a sack. An old South Down story tells of a shepherd of East Dean who, in the days when wheatears were trapped in horse-hair snares for the Eastbourne and Brighton markets, once took nearly a hundred dozen of the little birds in a day, more than he

could thread on his rook quills, so that he bundled them into a sack made of his round-frock, and called on his wife to make such another of her petticoat. At meal-times the smock is the rustic's napkin. A carter, taking "elevenses" or "fourses" in the field-hedge, catches the crumbs and fragments in the bag of the smock stretched between the knees, and then, in frugal way, gathers them into his hand, and passes them, with a deft toss, to his mouth. Or an old road-mender is seen scattering the crumbs from his smock to the companion of his leisure-moments, that arch lover of the high-road, the chaffinch. And as now and then the old round-frocks reappear on the rural scene at funerals, now and then, "on a sunshine holyday," a white round-frock is sported, to which is added the picturesque touch of a red 'kerchief round the neck, with dangling ends. Or a red rose is stuck in the hat, in accordance with the old song :

Ich will put on my best white sloppe,
And Ich will wear my yellow hose;
And on my head a good grey hat,
And in't Ich sticke a lovely rose.

The student of the book of country delights will be instructed not only in the difference between "eyes and no eyes," but between "ears and no ears" likewise. Those who, walking through woods, talk, must miss the music that may be ringing out all about them, or would be if they walked more delicately. Sights, perhaps, are more commonly appreciated than sounds, and there are quiet sounds to which untrained ears are heedless, as, for an extreme example, the chiming of harebells. And so with the quieter songs of the birds, those sung in minor keys, their inward melodies, which will be esteemed, when known and appreciated, as the most charming and intimate of all the songs they sing.

WILLIAM BARNES, as he lay dying, composed one of his poems in dialect, "The Geäte a-vallèn to," which conveys the idea that of all everyday sounds heard in a village, the one most human,

most poetical and musical is the click of a gate-latch :

And oh ! it is a touchèn thing
The lovèn heart must rue,
To hear behind his last farewell
The geäte a-vallèn to.

“ Observe that word ‘ geäte,’ ” said the poet to his daughter. “ That is how King Alfred would have pronounced it. If the Court had not been moved to London, then the speech of King Alfred, of which our Dorset is the remnant, would have been the Court language of to-day.” The writer of some Dorsetshire book has developed the point of the romance of the gate-click, showing how it follows the villager from birth to grave : all the story of the cottage is told by the clicking of the gate. One kind of click tells of children ; another of their father ; and another, in due time, of a lover. There is the click for the in-coming bride, and the click for the out-going corpse.

The poets have made much capital out of the baying of hounds, of cock-crow, and of a knock at a door—witness the knocking in “ Macbeth,” of which De Quincey said, it reflected back upon

the murderer a peculiar awfulness. Perhaps most people, taking thought, could name one familiar sound which, like rosemary, is for remembrance—the music of evening bells, or of sheep-bells, the scratching of a quill pen, the click of pattens on wet cobbles. The homely singing of the kettle was to Dickens “a song so cosy and hilarious as never maudlin nightingale yet formed the least idea of.” Perhaps most people pay more attention to familiar scents and sights than to such familiar sounds as the wind in the grasses, or the song of the cricket; and there are sounds too low for many ears—the beating of a butterfly’s wings, the voice of the bat, the little thud of the fall of a rose-petal.

So it is with some of the lesser songs of the birds; there are songs sung under the breath, as it were, which are commonly little heeded, but to some ears may mean more than the full familiar strains. “The blackcap,” wrote White of Selborne, “has, in common, a full, sweet, deep, loud and wild pipe; but, when that bird sits calmly and engages in song, he pours forth very sweet, but inward melody.” It is one of the most touching

songs in Nature. Not being a shy minstrel, the blackcap will allow you to stand on one side of a bramble-bush while he sings on the other; and you mark then the eager throbbing of the distended throat, and admire the glossy, velvet cap. He sings of sunshine, of bluebells, and of the droning of humble-bees among the bells, singing now in loud, liquid tones, wild and wayward, then very softly—under his breath. With the noise of the hidden brook in the sleeping wood, "He singeth a quiet tune." For ten or fifteen seconds the warble is sustained. Then he draws breath, and on he goes, till minutes pass into hours, and still he is singing. She must be a hard-hearted blackcap ("brown-cap," she might be called, since her cap is so rusty beside her mate's) that is not lured by such a charm to nest with him in the blackberry spray. He will do his duty by the eggs; and when he is sitting will beguile the time by quietly singing to himself.

His cousin, the willow-wren, on occasion, also will sing under his breath, if you are close, and he is watching, for sing he must, whether in danger or not, and now and then, if you refuse to go away,

he heaves a plaintive sort of musical sigh, perhaps reminding you of the weeping lady in the old ballad, of whom it was written, "She made her sighs to sing." The robin is given, too, to sorrowful sighing. In its plaintiveness and pathos—the sadness of joy perhaps—no song is more touching than what Stevenson called "the small pipe of the robin in the hedge." It is another warbler which has the habit of singing inward melodies, singing so softly that you might think the music came from a far distance. Or you might think the song was sung for your ears alone. The thrush, too, will sing an expressive undersong, as if humming over a phrase to himself: three or four times he whispers the notes, as if testing the quality of some new phrase he has hit upon by chance in the varied repertoire of his musical-box.

These inward melodies of the birds often pass unheeded by ears not keenly attuned to birds' music, alert to catch the least note of the least minstrels. There is another type of bird music which is little heeded, or, if heeded, is rated low: the rattling, reeling, croaking songs of high summer.

Throstle and merle are then oppressed by family cares; robin has gone into retirement to moult; Philomel's matchless voice has changed to a harsh croak—but the nightjar takes his place with a crooning song that is like the old-time night-watchman's rattle, or like the whirring song of the threshing-machine, with its rising and falling note. In the meadows where the warblers sang in April we hear, in place of their gracious music, the strident cry of the corncrake. "Crake—crake!" morning and evening it goes up continuously, and it seems to come from every part of the meadow as the elusive bird runs through the grass. And the crooning of the turtle-dove breathes the spirit of high summer. The gentle, purring coo suggests the syllables, "tur, tur, tur," oft repeated, and this possibly suggested the name. Most unbird-like of songs is that of the grasshopper warblers, whose note suggests the whirring of grasshopper or cicada. The grasshopper's music also is in drowsy harmony with the top o' the summer: "Cri, cri, cri-cri-cri!" is the burden of the song that can never be a burden to lovers of the great bare downs. To

many, indeed, the stridulous love-song, though often unheeded, is among the pleasantest of summer sounds, in tune with a drowsy afternoon. In his green coat the fiddler is well hidden in his green lair, though the kestrel deigns to stoop at him, and others, like sparrows and redstarts, know him for a tasty tit-bit. The field-cricket fiddle away, rubbing their wings one upon the other, through the midsummer nights. Another type of unheeded music is the singing of the fieldmice. And yet one other July song of the monotonous sort deserves special mention, the extraordinary effort of the French edible frog. His "brekekek-brekekek" carries fully half-a-mile. The singer is as grotesque as his song, carrying at his mouth two large bagpipes, the vocal sacs which have earned him in the Fens the name Cambridgeshire Nightingale. No doubt his is as much a love-song as Philomel's.

Every village has its craftsman, if only the village blacksmith, whose fire adds a brightness to the dulllest day, as the ringing of his hammer adds a sense of purposeful activity to a sleeping street. After a village's sights have been seen, the church and the old houses, the stocks and the whipping-post, the wayfaring visitor may often gain a pleasant experience by inquiring after any village crafts, weaving, lace-making, basket-making, straw-plaiting and the like, and seeking out the cottage or hovel that is the home of a peasant industry. And when jogging on along the footpath way, it is always a pleasure to pass the time of day with such open-air craftsmen as the hurdler or the hedger, and they can always tell us something new.

PEASANT crafts tend to die out, but revive from time to time as, in protest against things mechanical, schools are founded, where the dying embers of old arts and crafts are warmed to life by enthusiastic fanners. In many a Bucking-

hamshire village, a few pieces of lace behind a lead-paned window, and a collection of bobbins of wood and ivory, hint at an old woman skilled in pillow-lace making. In a Sussex village a goodwife is found who practises the art of making the smocks—round-frocks, as they are called—which now and then still appear in Sussex churches. In a Welsh glen the clog-maker is found, turning out by hand the clogs still worn by Lancashire lasses. Or in the Chiltern country one may happen upon craftsmen who gain their livelihood by fashioning comely beechen bowls by hand, as in the old days.

“Let every girl attend to her spinning,” said Don Quixote, and it is admirable advice; it would bring glad times if spinning were revived in our villages, and, with weaving, the ancient craft of dyeing with natural dyes. A South Down village, which numbers Alfred the Great among its Lords of the Manor, is one of many which have been converted to the practice of these crafts, and old women and girls may be found spinning wool for the looms as they go about their household affairs, even while they

are cooking. Most country people suffer from a sort of nervousness about bright colours in the things they wear, but in this village it gladdens the heart to see the gay colours, product of the village vats, which appear in the villagers' raiment.

It is a dyer's maxim that in commercial dyes the beautiful colour is rare, but with the traditional dyes—vegetable dyes, home-made—it is difficult to produce an ugly colour. The natural ones do not change colour when they fade, but only grow more mellow. It adds a charm to the bright, sun-holding colours seen on garments flaunted in a village street to know that they came from plants which grew in the hedgerows of the lanes about, from wayside fruits, or from lichens from the village's orchards, possibly from the churchyard's tombstones. That homespun jersey was dyed its sunny yellow from the common plant called dyer's rocket. Yonder jerkin of warm brown hue was dipped in a dye distilled from the gorse of the common. This jolly cap, striking a vivid note in the old village street, took its purplish hue from the juice of elderberries. That

gay skirt was incarnadined by the inner bark of a birch-tree. Those stockings (of which we gained a happy glimpse just now) took their pale blue from a privet-bush. The blackness of the Vicar's scarf came from an oak; almost any part of an oak yields a good black.

To become a good weaver means a long training, for this is no mean calling, and those who follow it in the right spirit should be prepared to give their lives to the work. An apprenticeship of two or three years should be served. But anyone may spin at home, and anyone may dye the wool. It seems fair that a spinner should be paid at about the rate of a charwoman, considering that spinning can, and always has been, done at home, surely the pleasantest way of work: so the pay for one hour's spinning is about sevenpence. The spinning wheels are lent out from the school of weaving, as the cost of a good wheel is now several pounds.

Then there is spindle spinning; this may be practised out-of-doors, and while walking about—shepherds could spin while they watch their flocks, as one remembers seeing a peasant girl

spinning on a mountain-side in a far country, while she minded her goats.

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An honest craftsman is the hedger : his pride is in his work, and the hedge he mends becomes a monument to his skill. It is a pleasure to pass the time of day with him, for nearly always, like the shepherd or gamekeeper, he can tell one something new. He knows the secret life of the hedge, finds the dormouse's winter nest, sees the "form" or "smeuse" of the hare, and the highway of the rats along the hedgebank, and may come upon a hibernating hedgehog, or a bunch of adders coiled in some hole. Though he often entertains a robin at "elevenses," the birds should look upon him as an enemy, one who destroys the wild, tangled hedgerows they love, and scatters and wastes the hedgerow harvests. He is a Philistine, too, and would cut every hedge to a pattern. He is often full of quaint saws. One old hedger has a local reputation as a weather-prophet, mainly gained by his curious habit of consulting his enormous old watch and chain before venturing on a prophecy. If asked,

“ Will it keep fine to-day? ” he at once takes out his great “ turnip,” and solemnly studies its case, with lack-lustre eye, as the clown looked at the dial, before answering, “ He don’t *say* ’twill rain,” or as the watch dictates by its appearance, which is dull in damp weather. This old man is honest enough to confess that he neither knows his own age nor his wife’s, and he cannot recollect his wife’s name. “ I calls her Paul,” he will say.

As we watch a woodman or a hurdler at his work, we may be inclined to think that his task is one of the most honest and enviable of outdoor crafts. From seven o’clock in the morning till five in the evening he swings axe and billhook, with a half-hour off at noon for bite and sup. There is intelligent thought behind his every stroke as to the best use of the wood he is cutting, whether it shall be for hedge-stakes, pea-boughs, or faggots. His lot is cast in a pleasant place, and in a most healing quietness, broken only, as winter passes, by the droning of the bees, the crowing of the pheasant, the trumpet-calls of the missel-thrush, or the screeching of jays.

There is a transparent honesty about the hurdler's work, though only experts, and time and use, discover where one hurdler excels another. He is among the last of our open-air craftsmen, and the race is dying. He has his complaints, enviable as his clean life seems, spent in the quiet woods, his chief being the rheumatism. In winter he grumbles against hard frost which makes his hazel-rods brittle, so that they snap and spoil his output: twelve hurdles a day at the best. He grumbles, too, about boys being educated, so that they will not submit to the tedious training he underwent in learning how to cut rods and strip them of knots, to split and weave.

Among ancient crafts in woodwork, that of the making of parts of the homely, comfortable Windsor chair, in Buckinghamshire beechwoods, is among the most fascinating to come upon on a woodland ramble. It is remarkable that the craft still flourishes in spite of the machinery in the chair-making factories of High Wycombe. A man with a few tools, and the most primitive of lathes—and years of experience—turns out

legs and spindles for chairs with a sweetness and trueness of curve and fineness of finish not excelled by machines. He is known as "the bodger," a term traced to the Celtic, "bok," for beech, which may have given the county's name. All his work is done in the woods, and within sight of where the trees grew, the boles and branches of which he turns on his lathe. The Buckinghamshire hills are largely covered with young timber adapted for conversion into chair-legs—"Buckinghamshire weed," left to look after itself: many woods apparently sprang from brushwood. For a hundred years or so the bodger has plied his industry, in his primitive shanty, with his home-made lathe.

You come upon gipsy-like encampments, where small parties of the craftsmen are at this work, or taking their meals round glorious fires of beech-chips. Each man has his little thatched hut, sheltering the lathe. It is fascinating to watch the work (especially as one lies at ease in the cool shade of the beeches on a hot midsummer day). The whole process of the making of a chair-leg or spindle may be followed through in half-an-

hour at the camp, from the felling of the tree to the magical transformation of a rough block into the perfect chair-leg, as smooth and gently curving as the daintiest of legs of any rogue in porcelain.

The bodger will tell how the shapely beech-stem is cut by a cross-saw into blocks eighteen inches long, which are split by a hatchet into a score or more of lengths each. These go to a "shaving-horse" in the thatched hut, where a draw-shave smooths the rough edges. Work goes merrily to the tune of fifteen dozen of the short lengths shaved in ninety minutes—" 'Tis work we call taking a rest," the bodger will say. The rough legs now go on the primitive lathe. Outside the hut stands an upright post, and from this runs horizontally a twenty-foot-long fir-pole to the lathe. A length of line runs from the slender tip of the pole to the treadle. The future chair-leg is fixed in place, a twist of the lathe line is taken round the wood, and at a touch of the treadle it revolves at speed towards the worker. With his gauge, in a twinkling he takes off the rough surface, another tool in another twinkling

cuts out the familiar rings or beads, and a touch with a chisel perfects the whole. The dexterity of the craftsman seems marvellous; he has the eye and hand of an artist. The legs and spindles are sold to the chair-maker's middlemen at ten shillings a gross, this pay representing what the bodger describes as fair pay for a fair day's work in the woods—in summer from 6.30 A.M. to 6.30 P.M.

The whole world cannot show the like of English meadows. In June they are fields of gold framed in silver. They have at all seasons their own birds, insects, and flowers, their own scents and sounds. Every hedge has its story: like night, it has a thousand eyes. For enjoyment of the country in the high days of summer, there is still no better advice than "Jog on the footpath way, merrily hent the stile"—the crooked stile that is the time-honoured trysting-place of "rustic swains and their mays," and the setting for half the love-affairs of the countryside.

THE field-path has many moods, few more appealing than its mood in the twilight of a June evening, as the nightjar begins to croon its even-song, and the ghost-moths hold the eye, as they perform the mysterious ritual of their dance above the grasses. The revellers, a goodly company, are the courtier males, prinked out in satiny

white. Each keeps to his own small beat, swaying across and across, hovering, rising, and falling: deeply intent, it seems, on luring a mate from the grassy depths. They may even allow themselves to be taken in hand. Now and then a moth with yellowish fore-wings and dusky hind-wings joins the throng of white gallants, a shy female, that seems to be so enchanted by the dancers' ghostly ritual that she can hold back no longer: she flies straight for one of her pendulous charmers, but soon drops to earth, to sit out the dance on the stalk of a moon-daisy.

With July, the mood changes. The flowers of the month are a glorious company. Midsummer brings a kind of second spring to meadows, downs, mountains and moors; heather brings a new sense of youthful life at a time when the woodlands have lost their vernal freshness. On chalk downs by the sea a race of flowers appears which simulate many familiar spring flowers, but are more delicate, such as the little August buttercups, minute chalices of gold, fit drinking-cups for fairies. The delicate dropwort of the downs, with its creamy flower-clusters, is a refined edition of the

meadow-sweet of lowland stream-sides. For the bluebells of May we have the bluebells of Scotland, called harebells in the South, most delicate and ethereal of wild flowers, azure bells ringing chimes too faint for our gross ears—possibly enjoyed by hares' ears: the south-country name may have been given from this idea, since the flowers blow in the haunts of hares. On west-coast cliffs the wild hanging flower-gardens are at the height of their beauty in midsummer. Splendid spikes of mullein rising five feet high are like tall candles set to illuminate the scarpes, and colour runs riot over the rocks, the purple of loosestrife and knapweed, mauve of scabious, gold of resplendent ragwort.

Rank as is the meadow-sweet of the lowland stream compared to the delicate dropwort, it deserves its name, Queen of the Meadows, as the silver birch is Lady of the Woods, and it distils its fragrance in July wherever a brook babbles through the meads, the creamy flowers rising tier on tier on the reddish stalks, like old lace in effect. It has no honey to offer the bees, but the heady perfume draws many ardent insect

worshippers. An old name was bridewort, from a fancied resemblance between the airy grace of the flowers and the white feathers worn by rustic brides in the old days. Where it blows among willow-herb and purple loosestrife it makes the loveliest border to a newly-shorn meadow, and from a distance, in some lights, the meadow-sweet along a stream wears a look of snow.

July is indeed the floweriest month of the year, with a hundred purple and yellow flowers for every three or four in April. The freshness of the summer begins to tarnish, woods become oppressive, and seem asleep, and with June many gracious things depart, like the cuckoo's wandering voice. That summer's old age is drawing on is seen by the sign of the dewberries. But after haytime comes summer's finest flower-show. Tribe after tribe waits upon the height of summer, as the St. John's worts, those Devil's scourges, heaths, mallows, thistles, scabious and knapweed; traveller's-joy appears, "decking and adorning waies and hedges where people travel," when St. Swithin christens the apples.

The bridge crossing the Devon trout-stream is a kind of natural rock-garden in midsummer, and it is a wonder to see how the ferns grow from the stones, along with such flowers as lesser willow-herbs. Mosses spread like a golden cloth, and bowers of ivy shelter the bridge's sentinel wren. Below is a natural water-garden. Watercress blooms in a sheet of white. Figwort rears itself ten feet high, its curious flowers luring wasps by their suggestion of rotten meat. In enchanting contrast are the blue flowers of skullcap, growing in pairs, like twins opening their mouths side by side. Rosy stars of codlins-and-cream—on which the white butterflies poise—mingle with the purple stars of loosestrife, happily named from its supposed power to calm the restive. A clump of loosestrife at the river's brink is a potent anodyne.

The old stone bridge always has a picture of wild life to show the wayfarer. Day after day it may be a grey form of a heron that is seen trout-fishing; or the azure back of a kingfisher, whose shrill cry is heard as you come to the bridge. You may cross ten times a day and always find a dipper among the shallows. When perched on a

small rock, and looking intently into the water, it gives the impression that it is admiring the reflection of its snowy breast. It is delightful to watch the wren-like form as it flits about after insects over the pebbles of the shallows, dives into a pool, to oar itself along with its wings, or goes swiftly flying to the next pool, and delightful to hear its sweet and brilliant song. The dippers keep to their own beats of the stream, where they will tolerate no intruders of their kind, so that one mountain stream may be portioned off between twelve or twenty couples. Year after year a pair will nest in a favourite crevice of rock, and if it happens to be behind a waterfall will fearlessly brave the spray in all their comings and goings. Should the dipper be absent from the shallows by the bridge, there is certain to be a grey wagtail, flitting about with exquisite grace, one of the most charming companions of the trout-fisher, an exquisite study in colour, with its bluish-grey head and back and velvet-black gorget, and, in contrast, the canary-like breast—long, slender, shapely, it displays all the highest wagtail graces. It lives in beautiful scenes, and

is faithful to its river haunt the year round. Besides its own sentinel wren, the bridge has also its own robin, who acquires some acrobatic skill in running along the ferny ledges.

After haymaking, the meadows wear a brown look, but a few showers magically repaint them in green, and gold hawkweeds spring up to replace the spilt gold of buttercups, bringing old Izaak Walton's thought of the meadows to mind, "That they were too pleasant to be looked upon, but on holydays." The hedges begin to be decked with scarlet haws and autumn-tinted leaves, and become ever more attractive to the birds. Finches take note of the ripening hips, starlings eagerly gobble the elderberries; the dewberries attract pheasants, birds over-fond of blackberrying, as they will roam far from their coverts down the old fences to eat the berries, fluttering up to jump for those just out of reach, and wandering on and on—perchance to some unneighbourly neighbours' coverts, whence they never return.

As we take the old advice, and "jog on the footpath way," finding with each step something

new in the lore of flower, fern, tree, bird and insect, all the songs of late summer go with us. The warblers are in their midsummer season of silence, but through the dog-days the finches, gold and green, make airy music which seems full of all pleasant ideas of the hot midsummer time. The greenfinches' long-drawn call, a tremulous sort of scream, is followed by warbled notes, and sweet canary-like trills. The goldfinches make music wherever they go. They seem as gentle and happy as they are pretty when flying from thistle to thistle, uttering their musical calls, and showing off the gold of their wings. The families have now embarked on nomadic lives. A goldfinch will wander many thousands of miles, and may cross seas, before coming faithfully back to the self-same spray of the apple-tree which is now its concert platform. With the coming of August, the robin begins practising its dirge of autumn, the song of the falling leaves. Passing from the meadow into the cornfield we come into the corn-bunting's sphere, a bird strangely lacking in the birds' graces, a picture of indolence as it sits for idle spells on the cornfield's hedge. When it

flies, on an undulating course, with a whirr of wings, the wing-beats are laboured and intermittent, and the lazy effect is heightened by the way the legs hang down. And it seems bored by its own song; this begins vigorously, but soon ends in a confused medley, as if many notes were uttered at once. Yet we like the bunting. It seems to take such a languorous joy in sunshine, and somehow its splintered notes are in pleasing harmony with sun-drenched cornfields. As in the meadows, the gloaming is the best time for the footpath through the cornfields, when the partridges are calling as they gather for the night—when perchance the little foxes come abroad, brushing their coats against the stems :

And little footpaths sweet to see
Go seeking sweeter places still.

People will live in the country without any idea of the names of the fields they cross or look upon every day: without knowing even that fields have names like Christians. Often they would find a deep interest in collecting old names from land-owners or their title-deeds, or from the large-scale maps, and in tracing their origins back through the misty ages, for the names enshrine a world of legendary lore or local history.

“ALL I say is,” wrote Thomas Hughes, “you don’t know your own lanes and woods and fields.” He added, that as for the country legends, the stories of the old gable-ended farmhouses, the place where the last skirmish was fought in the civil wars, where the parish butts stood, where the last highwayman turned at bay, or where parson laid the last ghost—they’re gone out of fashion altogether. Even the names of lanes, woods and fields in a countryside are often unknown to people

who have known the places all their lives. Land-owners would oblige many if they would cause these old names to be inscribed on gates or stiles where all might read, for they often hold the memory of a romantic past.

The names give the fields a kind of personality. Heron's Mead—the very words conjure a vision of the marshy field where of old a heron delighted to perch on a gaunt fir, a field with hedges fragrant in June with meadow-sweet, one where often a fox lurked, where on a sad day a man intended to shoot the heron, but brought down the last of the bitterns that ever visited the place. Some names commemorate rural feats; "Duffield's Field" is a name which commemorates how a man once mowed with a scythe the whole of the field, seven acres, in one day, the crop being a heavy one of barley. The field-names often enshrine the forgotten name of a farm or its owner, or tell of some ancient characteristic of the field, visible still, or perhaps improved away, as when Thistly Field is converted into the most fertile cornfield in the place. Many old names speak for themselves, such as Woodcock Field, Glebe Field, Church

Mead, Plum-tree Field, Hog Plat, Stonepit Field, Brambly Field, Withey Mead, Three-stile Field, or Tare Plat. Perry Mead pleasantly suggests pear-trees and pear-wine. Lime-kiln Field dates from the days when chalk was burnt in lime-kilns, and the lime spread as a dressing. The old name Whapplegate testifies to a whapple road, or bridle-path, running through the field. Fish-pond Field hints of the spacious days when fish-ponds were features of manorial houses. In a hundred forms, fairy mythology has imprinted itself upon our meadows. Those elves and nymphs named in Drayton's "*Nymphidia*,"

Hop, and Mop, and Dryp so clear,
Pip and Trip, and Skip that were
To Mab their sovereign ever dear,

have named many a field, and even hamlets and parishes. The fairies have kept their ground at Mab's-hill, Hob's Hawth, Pook-croft, Cobb's Close, Titsey and Elfenden—in hundreds of one-syllabled names.

Old green lanes, bridle-paths and by-paths often have names as old as themselves, and it is a pity they are not more commonly labelled. A

wanderer over the Chilterns might be all unaware that when following along a grass-covered way he is treading where pilgrims journeyed since time out of mind—along the Icknield Way, one of the longest British tracks still existing. Or the wayfarer might unknowingly follow Grime's Dyke, a trench which crosses Buckinghamshire for several miles, a stupendous piece of work carried out by ancient tribesmen, and sometimes called the Devil's Dyke.

Ancient tracks on the hills, usually with one bank, are called "covered ways," as they allow people to pass without being in view of heights above; a mile-long example is found in Arundel Park. There are others on the South Downs where an army might pass completely hidden from neighbouring points of vantage. Every deep valley of those old hills has its name, some idyllic, like "Happy Valley," some prosaic, like Starvation Bottom, Poverty or Hog's-Trough Bottom.

A good old name for a pathway between roads is "The Twitten," which may mean a betwixt and between way. Another name of the sort is

“The Nye,” meaning the near way. Chalk tracks on the Sussex downs are called “Borstals,” a word traced to “Bors,” a hill, and to “Stigel,” a rising track. Bridle-paths are presumably paths where a horseman may pass, but not a cart.

Years after a field has been left behind and forgotten, its name may instantly bring to mind old happy, or unhappy, memories. Some of us who, in glorious youth, had the run of broad manorial acres can never hear the field-names mentioned without recalling some escapade of the golden age, some fishing, shooting, poaching, or riding adventures, or the first duel in a love-cause : to which an end may have been put by the appearance of twelve-year-old Black-eyed Sue herself at the stile, a vision to send her lovers skeltering to the brook to wash off their blood-stains.

Who does not love an orchard—especially in apple-time? Through the seasons, the orchard throws its spell over all who, in youth, have climbed apple-trees for nests and apples, or robbed an orchard in daring sport. In the time of blossom, the birds haunt the trees for the grubs in the buds, and to nest in the crutches of the branches, and in holes in old trunks; and in the height of summer, as the apples glow in red and gold, the orchard is alive with their young, and the long grass gives sanctuary to a zoological collection of animals. A quiet orchard is a rare place wherein to find a new secret to the enjoyment of a countryside.

THERE comes a week in merry May which seems to mark the very top of the spring. This is when the fragrant lilac-buds are bursting, and the chestnut-trees bloom in signal for the entrance of the floweriest days of the year; it is the season between the first bloom of hawthorn and the first

wild rose. Laburnum follows after lilac; in orchards the rosy flowers of the apples follow the white cherry-blossoms; in woods there are ultramarine lakes of bluebells; and in gardens the crimson of peonies heralds summer's splendour.

Birds, like boys, are great lovers of orchards, which make a paradise for the nesting pairs, and even when the midsummer hush has fallen on most song-birds there is still music among the apple-trees. Here you are likely to hear at all seasons the flute-like whistling of the nuthatch, and its nest will be found in some tree-hole, easily discovered, as there is always a ring of clay plastered at the entrance. Sometimes a long-tailed tit will build in the crutch of an apple-tree, the lichen-covered nest exactly harmonising with the bark, so that it is only by seeing the birds coming and going that their secret is found out. And goldfinches are most faithful orchard-lovers. Goldfinch song sets the apple-blossom to music. And still, in the high days of summer, their silvery love-talk is heard in the orchard; they make music wherever they go. Goldfinches and greenfinches seem to be among the happiest of birds.

The hottest, drowsiest July day cannot silence the happy trilling and warbling of the finches among the orchard trees, music in harmony with the spirit of midsummer.

When the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough, we feel it is in its proper element. A setting of fruit-blossom adds a savour to the song. Some of the nest-builders are content with plain, mossy walls, others add silvery lichens and cocoons fastened with gossamer, the lichen or moss being taken from the nest-tree. The mother-bird is the builder, and spends about a fortnight in weaving the cradle, being cheered the while by the incessant song of her lord, "Tol-de-rol, lol-chick-wee-eed-o!" repeated many thousand times a day. And in May, Prettichaps, the garden-warbler, sings tirelessly on among the cherry-blossom. The chaffinch has its one short, rollicking stave; the delicate anthem of the willow-wren lasts but three seconds, though it is spilt from the orchard trees by the hour; the nightingale, like the wind, sings as it listeth—but Prettichaps emulates the feats of the sedge-warbler (that warbles almost continuously, by the hour) as

it sings its medley of a song from its cherry-tree platform.

Nearly always a missel-thrush is at home in an orchard, nesting year after year in the same tree, and after nesting-days often calling in at the orchard, as travellers must needs now and then call at home. The mistletoe-thrush remembers the orchard's mistletoe bough, and keeps up a supply of berries by setting the seeds when it rubs them into the crevices of bark, on cleaning its bill. When selecting a nest-site, the missel-thrush will sometimes go through a remarkable ritual. It will test every possible fork of a tree, with a play of wings turning about and about on each fork in turn, squatting awhile as if to judge if the size will suit. After some days of experiment, it selects a fork, and begins arranging the dried grass by a plan all its own—poising on beating wings to card the material in the claws, then almost standing on its head to smooth the sides of the nest with the breast. Meantime, the builder's mate cheers the work with ringing song, and does diligent sentry-duty, with the utmost gallantry driving off all comers, rook, crow,

magpie, or wicked-look jackdaw, while the mother bird will sacrifice her life rather than allow such a deadly foe as a weasel to attack her chicks.

Birds that nest in tree-holes delight in a quiet old orchard—titmice, wryneck, tree-creeper, woodpecker, owl and starling. The green woodpecker may be among the faithful residents, and then will often be heard laughing, or screaming like a parrot, and looking like a bird of the Tropics in its olive-green plumage, with the scarlet cap and bright yellow patch on the back. With chisel-like bill it digs insects out of rotten trunks, and digs out its nest-hole, first driving straight in through the trunk towards the heart of the tree, then digging down to about a foot's depth. Nuthatches find out and occupy the old nest-holes, and having once taken up residence in the orchard, are likely to stay for years, in autumn as in spring enlivening the quiet sanctuary by their flute-like calls. They delight especially in an orchard stocked with hazel-bushes. Their nests are stolen in turn by the orchard's starlings, and, after the starlings, the merry titmice may inhabit them, so that one nest in its time may serve many

families. In an orchard favoured by the presence of a family of lesser-spotted woodpeckers the rapping of the male parent's bill makes a curious addition to the music of the orchard's orchestra. The little drummer, in its pied plumage and red cap, cuts a striking figure, though no bigger than a sparrow, and shy to show itself, escaping much notice by keeping to the tree-tops. It will have its favourite drumming-tree. An imitation of the rapping noise will excite it to a vigorous response, like an angry challenge.

Another nest in the orchard may be occupied by a pair of tree-creepers, that come and go like ghosts of birds. They are the most modest birds in the orchard, almost the most modest of all our birds; few are quieter, and attract less attention. They are more abundant than would be supposed by those who mainly heed birds of fine raiment or fine songs. As there are poets' poets, so there are bird-lovers' birds, and the tree-creeper has a niche of its own in the naturalist's heart. A strongly-marked character makes appeal to us, and birds might be put into new categories, according to virtues or failings, feather

or song. Peacock and nightingale would head their classes. The great black-backed gull would be the arch murderer. The partridge would be the pattern of a lover; the skua, of the pirate, since it lives by chasing gulls, to make them disgorge their catches of fish. There are polite birds, like the Cayenne lapwings, which pay ceremonious calls on neighbours, making, on meeting, humble obeisance by touching the ground with their bills—and like the polite Cedar-birds of America, which sit in line on a branch, and pass a caterpillar, from beak to beak, from one end of the line to the other. The tree-creeper would deserve a category to itself, a unique place of honour as a bird engaged for ever on a single task—the climbing of trees for insects.

It has no fine feathers. A dusky back harmonises with the tree-trunks it haunts; a whitish breast, when it poises half-way up a trunk, in a listening attitude, may serve as a camouflage, breaking up form, counter-shading shadow, and perhaps cheating an enemy's eye by merging with a grey sky, so that the eye passes over it unseeing. All its parts are adapted to the busy

life of climbing it leads. It has, in a slender curved bill, a dagger for probing bark for its prey ; it has fine strong claws, and a stiff tail which serves as fulcrum as it clings to the tree. It has no voice to speak of, and few heed its little song. And it has a peculiarly detached way of going about its affairs. It seems wholly indifferent to man, wholly wrapped in its predestined task. It usually works by itself. In nesting-days the male leaves the nest-building to his mate, only showing signs of interest and affection by popping insects into her bill. But, in spite of so many negative qualities, there is something admirable in the tree-creeper's aloofness, and its unremitting labours in tree-climbing. It works like a machine. No sooner has it climbed one tree, in spiral ascent, than it flies down low to the trunk of the next, to climb again—the Sisyphus of birds.

We feel inclined to be sorry for the humble little tree-creeper, passing one day exactly like another, in a routine of deadly monotony. Perhaps it finds a satisfaction in doing one thing well. But we cannot help thinking it would make a difference to the tree-creeper if only it would

sometimes come down a tree backwards, in the way of a woodpecker, or head-first, like a nuthatch. A hound-puppy seems to crowd more joyous adventure into a day than a tree-creeper finds in all its life.

The last bird to be found nesting in the orchard may be another modest and sober one, the little spotted flycatcher. When its nest is set against an apple-trunk, nest and sitting bird are in such perfect harmony with the tree that only a close observer would find them out. When fly-fishing, it has its favourite perches, and will work the whole orchard thoroughly in the course of a day : it must do an enormous amount of good to the orchard-owner.

By day and night, many shy four-footed animals come to the orchard, and find good hunting. Squirrels may come, to play among the apple-branches, or take nuts from any hazel-bushes. The orchard's own rabbits attract stoats and weasels, the weasels hunting diligently for the field-mice that in turn hunt for and devour the humble-bee's brood. Often the orchard is the home of a hare ; and a fox may come when on his

nightly prowls round the farm. And the snake in the grass was ever a familiar orchard character, the harmless grass-snake that hunts the orchard's toads and frogs. From Adam's day to this, an orchard was ever a paradise.

If a subject for an essay were set, on the proper enjoyment of a day in the country in June, a point which might earn marks would be that the sweetest hours of a golden summer day are those of the half-lights, the evening twilight, or the daybreak which finds all the world bathed in a mystical green light. The Excursionist, going from town to country, may stay till the cool of the evening, and hear the birds at their vespers, but is likely to miss their even more fervent singing at dawn ; for unfortunately, while the birds' taverns open at about three o'clock in the morning, our inn-keepers are then asleep.

A TEUTONIC phrase, literally translated, is "Evening Sunshine." But the translated phrase conveys little of the sentiment of the original, full of suggestion of the cool time of the far-flung shadows, when the trees have "laid their long arms about the fields." It is curious that we have no equivalent phrase; but our language is richly

stored with others fraught with the mysterious beauty of the time following evening sunshine, as it fades into twilight. As spring comes slowly up our way, much of our satisfaction lies in the drawing-out of the evenings, and in the gradual receding of the time of gloaming from four o'clock in the afternoon in winter to ten o'clock in June, even to eleven o'clock. The gloaming-hour has ever made appeal to the poets, as to lovers, and all manner of romanticists. The various names which have been bestowed on this time of the hush of the evening make a curious study.

What could be more expressive than the phrase Howlet-time, for the spell of half-lights when the owl takes wing? It is found in old plays: "It shall be conveyed in Howlet-time." Unruly winds may then die down, and the day leaves us with the blessing of a scallop-shell of quiet. This Howlet-time was also the time said to be lying " 'Twixt hawk and buzzard," the twilight when one bird of prey was supposed to give way to another, a curious phrase which has a parallel in a legal expression for the evening gloaming, *Inter canem et lupum*, used in old-time criminal

proceedings to express an act done in twilight. Our fathers would speak also of "the day-going." In the old Border-laws one ran, "Also the night-watch is to be set at the day-going, and to continue until the day be light." The intervening time was the "Nightertale," a phrase useful in a rhyme :

So hote he loved, that by nightertale
He slept no more than doth the nightingale.

Another happy phrase for the fleeting moments of summer evenings, which bring forth moths and bats, was Moth-time. It conjures up, perhaps, a picture of a meadow footpath in the gloaming of a June day, when there are wild roses in the hedges, and over the mowing-grass dance the white ghost-moths, their wings on the ground in the morning telling of the bats' appreciation of moth-time. And there is the phrase, Cockshut-time. To the sportsman this is the hour of the spring evening when woodcock take the exercise called "roading"—flying to and fro, as along an aerial highway. Down the shaded course of the river, through forest glades dark with the shadows of the pines, the 'cock keep up their perpetual

flight, passing and repassing, as if in search of partners or rivals, at times engaging in a kind of tilting-match with their long bills. St. John, in his "Highland Sports," tells a story of a sporting turnpike man of Ashdown Forest, in Sussex, who would shoot the birds at cockshut-time as he drank his smuggled brandy while sitting at the turnpike gate in a glade of the forest; he reckoned to kill two or three 'cock every spring evening. The learned have explained cockshut-time as the time when poultry go to roost, taking its name from an instrument called a cockshut, or shoot, which was used of old in taking birds (in the expressive Latin) *vesperascente cælo*. Shakespeare has the term: "Much about cockshut-time," and in one of Ben Jonson's masques a First Fairy appears, who says, brightly,

Mistress, this is only spite,
For you would not yesternight
Kiss him in the cockshut light.

December's evenings, no less than June's, have their mystical twilight moments. As night falls, a looker-out, from any point of vantage, will be impressed by the ritual of the lighting of cottage

lamps. In the brief twilight spell of December, lamps are commonly lighted before it is quite dark indoors, the blinds not being drawn until night sets in. From a hilltop, the points of light spring out of the dusk, like stars appearing, and are very companionable to all wayfarers. Each window becomes a little beacon to field-workers going home along lonely ways, and they will make out what lights belong to what cottages and farms at two and three miles' range. For a brief spell the lights bring isolated houses into touch, as at dawn they are linked again by the ritual of cockcrow, when the roosters' challenges are taken up from farm to farm. A winter bird-picture belonging to this time is the one conjured up by the line, "The rooks are blown about the skies." The mellow cawing of the rooks as they wing home to roost seems in tune with December's evening sunshine. All of one large flock may not belong to the trees first reached, and before they part company, solemn and mysterious rites must be performed. High in the heavens the whole flock circles, the birds soaring, floating, looping, and diving as if in joy of their power of flight. If there

is a special purpose in their beautiful evolution it may lie in an instinct to collect all stragglers before a journey. At last, minds are made up, half the flock sets sail, while the others leisurely drop to the trees, amid a babel of good-night cries.

So in the gloaming of May evenings the rooks will give us a typical bird-picture of the hour, as the last stragglers fly from the fields to their nest-trees in the wood, to be greeted by a sleepy cawing from nestlings. It is the hour of the birds' vespers. Blackbirds and thrushes make up the main chorus of the evensong. Against this background of melody, one cuckoo answers another, like an echo; but their flutes may be in different keys. Cascades of willow-wren song drop from every bush. As dusk deepens, plaintive notes fall from the robin; like the brook to the sleeping wood, "he singeth a quiet tune." One by one the singers slip away. A pheasant crows, telling all that he is roosting. A sleepiness creeps into the last blackbird's notes. The stage is set for the nightingale.

At cockcrow of a midsummer morning it is the

rooks again that typify the hour as they drift from their roosting-trees over the fields, to settle in an elm, and there to caw forth at length their grace before meat. July in England brings occasionally a tropical day and night, with no healing "cool of the evening," but always a perfect hour comes with cockcrow. The light is quiet and grey at the opening of this ritual at about four o'clock, and the delicious cool air vibrates with bird-music. Robin may be the first singer to rival the hedge-cricket which have kept up their concerts all night; his warble of a July dawn suggests an autumn morning. A thrush, though his song-season is closed, may next be inspired to utter a few phrases, and then, loud and clear, rings out the wren's morning hymn, every note true, the trill perfect: at intervals of a few seconds, he sings his song ten times. At an immense height against a rosy cloud some small gnat-like specks may be made out—a band of swifts at their revels of dawn.

A naturalist could draw up a calendar for each month of the year, setting forth the different bird minstrels that sing at cockcrow. In March,

cockcrow is at a reasonable hour, and we may be in time for the best bird-singing of the day if taking the air between five and six o'clock, as the owls go home. The spring chorus grows stronger with every March day, and it may be observed that the chief singers happen to be the birds about which Bottom the Weaver sang so merrily—the blackbird of the orange-tawny bill, “the thristle with his note so true,” wren, finch, lark, and sparrow—that is to say, hedge-sparrow. By their glorious morning concert they repay a hundredfold the entertainment-tax of early-rising.

The Sybarites destroyed all their cocks, that their own slumbers might no longer be broken by their crowing. In ages less remote, by nations less effeminate, cockcrow was a welcome signal, and answered man's eternal question (heard incessantly in every town park to this day where children play till the last moment before bedtime), “What's o'clock?” Thus, the Romans called the third vigil cockcrow. “Cantus,” and “Gallicantus,” from the time of the Apostles, marked a division of the day, and the time for the singing of a morning hymn. The Saxons divided

the night into seven parts: Even, gloam, or twilight; full evening; the dead of night, when the creatures of day are silent in their rest; midnight; cockcrow; daybreak; and morning. Three times the cock was supposed to punctuate the passing of a winter night, at midnight, at three, and at an hour before dawn. He told the time to fairies, courtiers, and rustics. Oberon, in the play, ordered Puck to report at "first cockcrow." Capulet, hearing the second cockcrow, said, "'Tis three o'clock." The porter in "Macbeth" remarked, "Faith, sir, we were carousing it till the second cock." In those days the cock was truly the trumpet of the morn, and to this day he awakes the farmyard, and the farm-labourer stirs to his réveille.

In May and June the best bird-singing of the day is over by seven o'clock in the morning, and at least until the cool of the evening comes there are no songs to compare to those of the hour before dawn, when larks sing by starlight—"And singing startle the dull night." Any teacher of the love of the out-of-doors would be in duty bound to take the classes abroad in the very small hours—choosing a countryside with an abundant lark and nightingale population, and rich in blackbirds and cuckoos. Those who know how dawn breaks after a fine June night know sunrise for the most enchanted time of the day and the year, not excepting the cool of a summer evening.

It was soon after three o'clock in the morning, in a Sussex meadow in June—while the night was dark, with stars shining, though paling before a green glimmer of dawn—when the first of the larks to awake sprang aloft, as if to look for and call

up the sun. So he justified his reputation as an early riser, but the cuckoos had been calling since long before, one answering another, like an echo, and the short night had throbbled with nightingale song.

All round the South Down hamlet the nightingales were singing through the hour before dawn. They ringed the place round with a crystal wall of melody. And while the cuckoos, through a vigilant night, called on all sides from meadow and copse, the sleepless peewits were often wailing, and there was a moorhen croaking from a pond long before the first lark went up. But it was he who sounded the *réveille*-call to all the other sleeping larks and meadow-pipits. He sang out his full song, alone, and in the dark, then sank to earth, and instantly another, and many others rose, and the lark music truly fell from the starry sky in a rain of melody. It was too dark to see any of the singers.

An owl went hooting home after his night's hunting, with a parting cry to all companion fly-by-nights. And at once a barn-door cock retorted with a good-morning crow, bringing the

line to mind, "The owl has wakened the crowing cock." The first crow was a signal, like the first lark's song, and at once it was taken up and answered from all directions till the welkin rang. Cockcrow at its height was a ludicrous performance to be added to the rising chorus of lark, nightingale, and cuckoo. Every rooster in the countryside must have stretched his neck and crowed his lustiest: it was as if the cocks really thought the sun was rising to hear their discordant hymn. Happily, their ardour soon spent itself.

Five minutes after this ritual of cockcrow, before the stars had paled, and while the Great Bear was still visible, the song-thrushes opened their matins, and the blackbirds followed, with their rich, lazy trolling. And then all the other sons of the morning seemed to awake as one and take up the chorus, the notes of all singing-birds mingling in a sublime anthem. No one singer could be followed in the flood of song. It arose in an instant to a full height, as a chime of bells might clash out on a signal. It filled earth and air. And still the nightingales sang on. In

brilliance and purity of voice they out-sang the rest, their long-drawn notes and the throbbing ones standing out against the background of the others' songs, the contralto of the blackbirds, the treble of the larks, the soprano of the thrushes. They seemed to be asking, "What hath night to do with sleep?"

Before four o'clock the stars were routed, until only a lamp or two was left alight. In the mystical green twilight, shadowy bird forms could now be seen moving on the wing. Crossing the field, you called a pair of partridges, stirring them from the warm, worn spot where the faithful lovers had spent the night. So they had been together since January, in a six-months-long courtship. From the meadow's pond, the moorhen was flushed that had been croaking to greet the dawn. Her green legs, red-gartered, did not carry her far, and she soon returned to add another egg to her red-speckled collection.

Moving about, one came near to the different singing-birds of the chorus. Now the robin's song could be picked out from the kaleidoscope of notes. Then one encountered a greenfinch,

singing like a canary. Near by was heard a blue-tit's hurried tinkle, a hedge-sparrow's warbled contribution to the general hymn, a lilting song from a whitethroat, roundelay of blackcap, or anthem of willow-wren. A woodpecker came with looping flight from a wood, and an exultant, laughing cry to the new day. A fox barked in a distant covert, whereat a pheasant crowed vain-gloriously, as if aware that the hymn of the feathered choir meant the end of the fox's hunting.

Before four o'clock, the fields began to show, silvery-white with dew. Not one daisy was yet awakened by all the music. In the enchanted world of the woods the different tones of the trees became slowly discernible in the grey-green light, the olive of young oaks, vivid emerald of larch, sunny greenery of young beech leaves. A drift of campions looked like a rosy mist, and not like flowers, no stalks being visible to connect them with earth. A squirrel appeared in a larch, looking forth to find the day; baby rabbits began scampering in the dew. The pipistrelle bats still hawked for night-moths. Rooks sailed forth

from their nest-trees, and the clamour of their nestlings, waking up, added to the general babel. And now, as the glow of sunrise spread from north to south, the pæans of song began to die down. There had been a few moments when the singers had seemed to combine in a climax of music. Soon after came a quiet moment so hushed that a nightingale made himself heard again as a soloist.

The ritual of the morning *Te Deum* ended in the dusk before full dawn. One wonders about the meaning of this triumphal song which ushers in a June morning while it is still dark. There is never a silent moment, of course, through a day of spring : it is music all the way along the paths to summer. But the birds' songs of sunny hours are the everyday songs that we know, sung as they go about their affairs, and take their meals, to cheer their mates through the tedium of sitting on eggs, or to lure coy mates to their sides—who knows why birds sing? Their singing by starlight before the sun rises seems different alike in quality and motive. There is no such rapturous singing through the day, though something of the quality

is recaptured at evensong. As it is too dark for finding early worms when the song-festival swells to full power, it is like a grace before meat.

What many seek to enjoy in the country is peace. To walk in the country is good and healing ; and it is good sometimes to imitate the poet Gray, who, when in Burnham Beeches, would " Squat and grow to a tree-trunk for a whole morning." The quiet old mill-pond is always a place of rare refreshment. It is cool here in the hottest noontide, where the water slips by the idle wheel, which is never without its own music, but the evening is the healing time, when the peace of the place (as Sancho Panza said of sleep) covers a man all over like a cloak.

THE quiet mill-pond gives gracious sanctuary to many birds, but is especially the pond of the swallows' delight. It may be that they come only because it is their native haunt, and it would be against their nature, and not to be thought of, to go elsewhere. Yet some strangers, drifting in from overseas in April, after crossing the South

Downs, may well decide, on reaching the pond, to go no farther, and nowhere could they find better fly-fishing than over these peaceful mill-waters.

The mill-pond is an ancient place, to be read about in history-books, lying close under the north face of the guardian downs of Sussex. In-coming swallows have but a few miles of down to cross from the sea, then drop from the hill's crest to the pond's haven with hardly more than a wing-beat, and at once are at home. So they and their ancestors have come in every spring to this one beloved spot since the days of Rameses, or at least since there were Kings of England to hunt in these parts who delighted in goodly fish-ponds. Viewed from the north end, from the pleasant oaken seat provided by the water-gate above the mill-wheel, the pond is the foreground of a scene which pleads to be painted; its green waters, reed-fringed, set about by may-bushes and old trees, beyond them the fields of the cloth of butter-cup-gold. In the middle distance stands the Tudor moated grange, red-gabled and black-timbered, sombre yews behind; above the yews,

high elms and oaks, in freshest greenery of May, haunted by rooks. The background, high and close above the trees, is the olive-green rampart of the downs, like a towering wave about to curl and break. The picture of the grange and the hills is reflected in the green pond, as if Nature would duplicate such a masterpiece, as the thrush sings each song twice over.

They are fortunate swallows that haunt these enchanted fish-ponds. Through all daylight hours from April to October they dip and soar in companies about the surface, their twittering telling of their content. They are tireless, though flying five hundred miles or more a day, and one never tires, in turn, of watching their evolutions, or admiring the gloss of their blue backs or the chestnut of their throats, seen for a second as a bird turns and soars—or the snowy-white patches of the martins' backs, or the scythe-shaped wings of the swifts, whose exultant screeches are in keeping with their wild flight.

Another famous fly-fisher is always at home in summer by the mill-pond, the spotted flycatcher whose favourite perch is a low branch of an over-

hanging oak, whence he launches himself a thousand times a day on short fly-fishing voyages, to return to the same perch. He has no music, but we are satisfied by the charm of his fishing performance, for all his solitary and somewhat dejected appearance. There is always rare music about the pond from thrush, blackbird, lark, and nightingale, and all other warblers, so that we no more ask song of the flycatcher than of the kingfisher, also among the pond's fisherfolk, though his haunt is the narrow mill-stream. The flycatcher, looking forth from his perch for insect prey, evidently believes with Dogberry that for the watch to babble and talk is not to be endured. And well he carries out the duties of a watchman, "to comprehend all vagroms."

It is cool on the hottest day where the water slips by the idle wheel, and goes racing in holiday mood down the channel of the mill-race, leaps a waterfall, and so gains the fair level of the meadows. The miller's little meadow flanks one side of the stream, on the other is his orchard, radiant with rosy bloom. The meadow is famous

for its white violets through the countryside. Its shade from beech and poplar looks the cooler for a spread of lilac lady's-smocks on the rising mowing-grass, and the foamy masses of May-weed waving above all. Hours pass pleasantly here by the old wheel, with the swallows for company and amusement, and, for music, the cooling, healing song of the waterfall. Some sheep in a sunny meadow next the miller's look uncomfortable in their heavy coats of dingy wool, but are nearer to a bath and a shearing than they may know, for in the field is the washing-pool, its antique tubs always in place for the lively work to be done in early June, in the days of wild roses.

Moist, cool ferns and moss cling to the old wheel. Little pools have been formed at the top of it, by water trickling from the sluice of the pond, and in these thousands of tadpoles have managed to get themselves hatched. Should they turn to frogs, a leap of twenty feet to the stream below seems their one hope of salvation. The wheel is never without its music, from the song of the waterfall to the merry rattle of its own wren,

that nests in some ivy just above, or the plaintive tune of the mill's tame robin, now blessed by seven naked, black-pated youngsters in a mossy cup as close to the wheel as may be. This robin and wren of the mill carry out the traditional notion of their companionship, as where their names are linked in the saying, "The robin and the wren are God Almighty's cock and hen." The wren scolds and swears at the miller's cat, who is fond of water, and like other miller's cats goes to the stream to fish.

Crooning music comes from a pair of turtle-doves whose nest in a tree above the wheel is so slight that the eggs may be seen through it from below. Nests of wild birds are without number in this quiet haven. A pair of moorhens have a neat cup of flags on the stump of a willow at the pond's edge, with eleven red-spotted eggs. The nest is too small for so grand a clutch, and a new one will be built for the young when the first of what should be three broods is hatched. From the water-gate above the wheel one looks down on the sitting bird, a quiet study in her green-brown feathering; or she may be seen taking the air of

the meadow, showing off her graceful green legs, tossing her head and flirting her snowy tail. Does she think of the trouble she is bringing on herself by hatching those eleven eggs? The rather musical croaking of the moorhens is pleasant to hear from all round the pond. They have companions in the little dabchicks that are always so careful, on alarm, to cover their eggs with wet leaves before slipping from the nest to dive to safety, and look when afloat like so many imps of darkness beside the pond's angelic-looking swans.

The evening is the time to feel the peace of the place, when purple shadows fill the coombes of its guardian downs, and every hare-track may be seen on their face. Then a pair of stately herons, with trailing legs, drifts over the water to a favourite fishing-pool. One by one the swallows dip for the last time to the water, and go to roost. A sleepiness creeps into the thrushes' parting notes to the day. Swifts race and screech high overhead, one of a pair chasing the other back to the nest as the twilight deepens. Long after sundown the sedge-warbler querulously outpours

his medley of song at the least disturbance of the sanctuary. A notorious babbler, he is yet a reliable night-watchman, and will bid any man stand.

A sovereign recipe for the enjoyment of the countryside in June is to find out a hayfield, and one where the haymaking is done in the quiet old patriarchal way. "Haysel" was ever one of the pleasantest of Arcadian festivals of labour, and it needs but a few condiments to perfect its flavour ; a genial sun to bring out the attar of hay ; an old blue waggon ; wild roses on the hedges ; and some children to fight again the old battles of the hay-castle, and play at pirates in the rolling ship of the fields.

HARVESTING scenes have always had their place in literature, from the time when the nightingale's sobs pierced the heart of Ruth, " In tears amid the alien corn," and witness the harvest canvases painted by Thomas Hardy. The hayfield is somewhat neglected as a setting for romance, perhaps because the scenes have less colour and rugged strength than the age-old harvesting pictures. But half the romance of the countryside clings to the meadows' stiles. " Haysel "

still holds its own peculiar charm. There is the aroma of hay, distilled by one grass of great virtue, the sweet vernal; there should be wild roses and honeysuckle on the hedges, and meadow-sweet in the ditches; and there may haply be a pretty wench or two, tossing the hay while sheltered beneath a sun-bonnet. As scythes and knife-blades go rattling through the long grass, new secrets and treasures of the summer come to light, like the eggs of the partridges which had hoped to find perfect sanctuary in the jungle of the grasses, the nests of larks and of mice. Haymaking is part and parcel of the madrigal of June, and there are fields about some country houses—parsonages especially—where the making of the hay is still a kind of rural festival.

The good old rector calls his family about him, calls out his men-servants and his maid-servants, calls in his neighbours, puts on a shady, antique hat of straw, bought in heaven knows what remote age, and, carefully stuffing the hat with a cabbage-leaf, sallies forth to his glebeland at the head of a retinue. It is a patriarchal picture. The rector has summoned the one or two ancients

of his parish who can still mow their acre in a day, for he likes the scythe better than the knife-blades, and loves to hear its swish in the grass and the pleasant music of the whetstone. He judges the ripeness of the grass by its flowers, saying that if the hay is to be to the cattle's taste the blossom must be on the grass as it falls. And the scythe does not scatter the seeds in the reckless way of the machine. There is no such hay-making anywhere as in the rector's fields. "Every chip," said a rural worthy, "won't make a felly for a wheel, and," he added, "it takes a good deal to make up a squire or parson after the old stroke."

Into the meadow lurches that great ship of the country, the hay-waggon, gaily painted in blue, and lovely in its every curve. The rector's old grey horse pulls the loaded waggon almost with the same ease as he drags the rectorial waggonette, with its huge old-fashioned cover, over the long miles to the country town. It is the pleasantest work in the world, on a fair summer day, the raking, tossing, loading, and unloading. The hayfield swarms with children, who know they are

welcome, and haply may be feasting on strawberries before the day is out. They are mostly the children of the gardener, who is likewise coachman and groom, cowman, hedger-and-ditcher, thatcher, bell-ringer, verger, and grave-digger; and they bring in their friends, for there is nothing the country child loves better than to romp in "the happy hills of hay." They swarm up the masts of the field-ship, and clamber about the bulwarks, and each in turn is made to walk the plank by a wicked pirate as the cargo of treasure is piled to the height of the masts.

Three old women in sun-bonnets, in a hayfield, will make a picture; there may be a pretty dairy-maid among them, in a pink bonnet, for somehow there always seem to be pretty maids about the rose-covered old rectory. As becomes a festival, now and then libations are poured from a brown jar kept in the shade of a beech.

Until about St. Barnaby's Day, the hayfield has been a paradise for bird life. But though tragedy stalks with the mowers, as they cut through the veil which has given sanctuary to rabbit, field-mouse, hare, weasel, hedgehog, and

many a nesting bird, when the mowing is finished, the birds come again in the cool of the evening to the quiet field where the fallen grasses and flowers lie in orderly rows, like dead after a battle. It is the pride of the ancient mower to lay the swathes with perfect evenness. Linnets, in small family parties, cross and recross, twittering musically, and goldfinch families, which cannot fly without singing. Swallows come in force for the disturbed insect life, one or other of a pair of parents flashing from the field to the nest in the barn, with food for nestlings, once in every two or three minutes, for sixteen hours a day. The farmer finds what he calls "stolen nests" of poultry or guinea-fowl. The eggs of the partridges, and those of larks and pipits, possibly of a corncrake, may be the perquisite of the rooks which march and countermarch across the shorn field, seeking also nests with young voles. At night come other hunters, like the farm cats, to pick up parent mice searching for their nests and young.

As the hayfield is full of pictures—of the men loading the waggon, the women and girls wielding the rakes, the boys at the horses' heads—so it has

many other pleasant sounds besides the music of scythe or machine, such as the boys' long-drawn cries, "Stand fast!" uttered every time they start the teams. Before the change in the style of the calendar, when St. Barnabas was the patron-saint of haymakers—"On St. Barnaby Day, cut thy hay," ran the old adage—the nightingale was associated with the hay-harvest, as witness the old ballad :

Sweet jug, jug, jug,
The nightingale doth sing,
From morning until evening,
As they are haymaking.

The Country Excursionist may find a novel amusement by seeking out the chance to witness such entertaining side-shows of rural life and work as the yearly ritual of the sheep-washing or sheep-shearing. A generation ago these, with the harvest-home supper, and Christmas, were the chief festivals of the year which broke the monotony of the field-labourer's life : when men commonly worked through all their lives on one farm, working for twelve hours a day, or from dawn till dark in winter, for ten or twelve shillings a week. Harvest-home is almost a festival of the past. But now and then in the country we come upon minor festivals of work, still imbued with the old pastoral spirit of the days when the labourers did much of their work to the tune of old songs ; and they are as good as pastoral plays " to one who has been long in city pent."

SOME think of the shepherd as a prophet-like figure, wrapped in an old cloak, leaning on his crook, and gazing with dreaming eyes down the

long valley where his sheep graze. Few think of him as a man of endless cares, well acquainted with heavy toil; or think of the labour of pitching a fold in an iron-hard field in the time of drought, of the anxious weeks of lambing-time, of the sheep-washing and the sheep-shearing. He is not always dreaming away the golden summer hours.

One sheep-washing pool may serve a wide district. If there is a hamlet to be passed on the way, the arrival of the sheep in the early morning will create an unwonted excitement. The shepherd and sheep may have journeyed half a morning's march before the sleepers are stirring, and the noise of his passing brings many from their beds; the scuffling of the hurrying feet, eager yelping of the dogs, the shouts of the men. We might suppose that the five hundred weary, hot, panting, pushing, complaining creatures, in their dense and grimy coats, would enjoy a swim in the cool washpool, but sheep are no lovers of bathing, and have a horror of death by drowning.

Presently the shepherd and his dogs set the tide flowing away from the dusty road into green pastures. At the journey's end, with more shout-

ing and barking than ever, more pushing and bleating, and with some excursions after renegades, the flock is penned in various folds alongside a meadow's stream. The sheep quieten down, and the men sit in the shade by the water, bright and clear as yet, break their fast on bread and cheese, and rest for a spell before the long day's work begins.

Sheep-washing is almost the last of the old-time rituals of the farm to be preserved with its ancient, primitive flavour. There is no more pastoral sort of scene in the Arcadian calendar. The meadows are decked in their June bravery, white with the great moon-daisies, red with the sorrels. The washpool is shaded by a mighty ash, and white guelder-roses overhang the brown, sun-flecked water, foxgloves bloom on the stream's margins, the bushes above the waterfall are covered by roses. There is an old-time charm about the scene which carries the mind far back—how many years? Through all the years that have gone since the rosebush sprang from a seed dropped by a bird, through all the good Junes we have known.

Nothing is changed since our fathers' day. The old shepherd wields the same ancient "rubber" of his fathers, for rubbing and dipping each sheep as it is thrown into the pool, a ten-foot pole with a crosspiece of wood at the end, an implement as perfect for its purpose as the shepherd's crook. It rubs the water into the close-matted fleeces, and dips a sheep's floundering form in a kindly way, with a touch that does no hurt. The shepherd has four men with him to obey his word, which is law. Two of these, swathed in sacking, will enter the wooden tubs partly submerged in the water; two are armed with long-handled hooks, to steer the swimming sheep along a channel after their washing until they may come ashore, to keep up their heads if they should sink beneath the weight of their sodden wool, and to pull out any unfortunates which may go under, from being water-logged, or from fright. The hooks have been used for generations, reminding us again that sheep-washing is like an ancient festival.

The brief rest taken, the scanty meal finished, the hard, unrelenting toil begins, to be carried on

through hour after sunny hour, with pauses only when the pen nearest the pool is emptied of sheep and must be refilled, or for visits to a stone jar. From the main fold a woolly tide of sheep is set flowing to a narrow gangway of hurdles, and is pressed along this, much against its will, to the fatal end of the passage nearest the washpool. The sheep hold back, shrinking from the ordeal, but the good dog Watch makes them understand there is no hope, and no escape. The older ewes are artful, but Watch is more artful, running on their backs in his eagerness to urge them irresistibly onward. The leading bunch of twelve or so is suddenly shut off from the rest by a deftly-dropped hurdle. The man who will throw the sheep into the water has the hardest work, but he is a giant, and does not think of allowing another to take his place.

He throws his long arms about an ewe, and she is held as in a vice. One heave, and she is off her legs, sprawling in his arms on her back, a comical and distressful figure. A step forward brings him to the poolside. Another grand heave—splash!—and the mass of wool sinks, hind-

quarters first, into the depths of the pool. As the sheep rights herself, and strikes out for the shore, the shepherd drops his rubber on to her neck, and with a touch dips her head beneath the surface. She is dipped and dipped again; back and forth she swims across the pool, where another sheep soon joins her; then the rubber steers her to an ash-pole set an inch or two above the surface, and under this she passes to the second stage of her journey. Now she comes to the hands of the two men in the tubs, who take the sheep as they swim alongside, to dip and rinse, and pass them on up-stream. In the third stage they are in the charge of the two men with hooks standing on the bank, who guide them in on their way to the landing-place. With melancholy, if grateful bleating, each sheep struggles ashore, and the water pours off her coat. Shaking herself, she ambles off to join those who have passed through the ordeal, and soon is contentedly nibbling the sweet grass. She does not look much cleaner for her washing, but the sun will dry the fleeces white.

The first bunch of twelve are washed sooner

than the story takes to tell. "Coo-up, bodies, coo-up!" calls the shepherd, leaving the pool-side to drive up the next victims, who have no desire to "come up" till Watch gives tongue. The shepherd and his mate jostle, throw, and cheer them forward. "This be a good yeow, Jarge," calls out the shepherd, as a ten-stone ewe takes the water with a mighty splash. "A reg'lar helephant," says Jarge, whose mighty back has felt the strain of her weight. The shepherd of course knows each sheep, and has a personal greeting for most of them as they make their plunge.

It is the turn at last of the last year's lambs, to whom the experience of water is new, but in Jarge's hands any resistance is futile. They are featherweights to the giant, the speed of the work quickens, and the woolly forms fairly fly from Jarge's arms. So it goes on till late in the afternoon, when the last of the five hundred is thrown into the pool. It is pleasant to lie in the shade of the ash-tree, and watch and sketch the pastoral scene, reflecting that the shepherd and his merry men are doing a part of the world's essential work. They lament that times are not

what they were. In the old days there would be several gallons of beer provided by the farmer for each man working at the washpool; those were the good old days.

In the height of summer, our old chalk downs by the sea call insistently to those who have ever trod their springy, fragrant turf, and more especially to those born and bred in their shadows. You come, in midsummer, to a kind of second spring on the hills. As you climb, your cares grow lighter: the hills invest you with their freedom. Reaching some high promontory, resting on some bed of wild thyme, affairs of State seem far distant, and ever farther: the fiddling of a grasshopper is a matter of more moment.

ON all the long, undulating brow-line of the northern escarpment of the South Downs, there is no more delectable promontory in East Sussex than the height called Blackcap, from its small, circular crown of dwarf trees, a landmark, like Chanctonbury Ring, from the far hills across the whole breadth of the Weald. These old Downs call insistently, in midsummer days, to all who are

native to them, or friends, for they are most beautiful at the top of the summer, by reason of the new glory of their late flowers: and very alluring is the thought of the breeze from the sea that blows over the brow on the hottest and drowsiest of midsummer days, when no breath of air whispers in the corn below. Up on the hills you come to a sort of second spring-time of flowers.

The way up to Blackcap is by a chalky track from the undulating road at the foot of the hills. As you mount, the view of the Weald grows ever vaster, till, lying below you in the shimmering heat-mist, is a vista of a thousand square miles of green and blue landscape. You soon leave the chalk for the sweet, downland turf, and half-way up must needs lie awhile to look at the view, on a mellifluous bank of wild thyme. All about you purple orchises raise their flower-spikes on straight stems, the "long-purples" growing in hundreds. Among them is a humble green orchis, lost against the green groundwork of the turf; or it is bee-orchis that holds the eye. To the fragrance of the thyme is added that of the sweet-scented plantain, another of the purple flowers

which deck the hills before the spreading of the royal mantle of heather. And the bank is embroidered with golden ladies'-fingers, with orange hawkbits and lemon cats'-ears, clovers, in red, white, and rose, clusters of little marguerites, clumps of the tiny cathartic flax, a fairy-like flower, bed-straws, fitting couch for fairies, the sun-loving rock-rose, and milkwort in variety of hue.

Climbing again, you pass presently into the cool shade of a beechen hanger, reminding you of the one of immortal renown at Selborne. This is as beautiful, and more lonely, few climbing the steep, narrow path winding between the beeches to the summit, and it needs wary walking, as the trees are on the side of a precipice. After the strong sunshine of the open down, the light here is gratefully subdued among the tall, grey beech-stems, rising to their green canopy. And it is as quiet as a cathedral, silent, save for the wind in the leaves, the droning of humble-bees, as they return, somewhat tipsily, from the thyme beds, the call-notes of foraging parties of titmice, and now and then a merry lilt from a wren. The one noisy

resident of the hanger is the green woodpecker, and his loud alarm-notes, raised against a trespasser, ring out like the screaming of a parrot. His gorgeous feathers, the crimson cap, black eye-stripes, black-and-red moustache, and greenish-yellow back bring a tropical splash of colour to the green scene. When his mate enters the nest-hole high in a beech-stem, her habit is to land above, and descend by a jerky, retrograde movement to a point below the nest; thence, after a pause, she nimbly runs up into the hole. It may be for protective concealment that as she hangs to the tree, half in and half out of the hole, her body forming a right-angle as she surveys and feeds her young, the bright patch of yellow feathers low on the back looks more like a bunch of sunny leaves than anything to do with a bird.

The floor of the sloping wood is a rich red-brown from its carpet of last year's beech-leaves, brightened in tone where shafts of sunlight manage to steal through the stems of the beeches on the upper edge of the hanger. No sunbeams may pass through the green leaves, so vividly green aloft in contrast to their fallen predecessors: it is

always cool in the hanger. Emerging into the sunshine beyond, you are on the brow of the hill, looking southwards across miles of rolling, prairie-like hilltop country to the sea. A soft, warm breeze greets you, straight from the sea, fragrant with the savours of the myriads of flowers it has blown upon; and all the larks make you welcome—it is no metaphor to say they rain their songs on these solitudes, songs with something in them akin to the skirl of bagpipes. Spirits rise at the lilting strains of the aerial pipers, and their songs aloft, and the draughts of the heady air, the sense of spaciousness and freedom, all tend to uplift and exhilarate, so that old people say their youth comes back to them on the hills.

Whatever winds rage, shelter is always to be found on one side of Blackcap. On the north side is as comfortable a hollow, the remnant of some primitive earthwork, as could be desired for the dreaming away of a hot July afternoon. The rim shuts from view the fall of the hills, and you seem to be at a great height above the chequered landscape of the Weald, with its blue heat-haze.

Parliaments, cities and markets grow distant to you when up here, in the heat of the drowsy afternoon, as you listen to the wind in the bents, to the burden of the grasshopper, and the chiding notes of Blackcap's own robin that scorns crumbs of human charity, and has made this solitude his own : surely the loneliest robin in Sussex.

To walk by a dew-pond on the downs may be to see only a small round pond, having nothing of special interest except from being a pond reputed to be magically fed by dew. But to lie down beside it in ambush—only to lie still on the open outer bank of the pond—is to have the lively company of the birds through every minute of a hot summer afternoon. They come fearlessly to drink almost within reach of a quiet observer, and provide a rare and enchanting study in bird-life.

ON Ditchling Beacon is a dew-pond, one of the highest in Sussex, near a thousand feet above the blue mist which is the sea far across the valleys to the south, and the vast blue, green, brown, and purple sea lying to the north, which is the Weald. This old pond, replenished by the dews of heaven, is shaped like a great basin set down just below the Beacon's summit, the ring of the basin a hundred and fifty paces. A deep, treeless valley

runs seaward from its southern side; westward runs an emerald-green plain, rising and falling, with the faint blue outlines of Mount Caburn to bound the far horizon; and eastward towers the Beacon's head, where of old the signal-fires gave warning to the Weald of dangers coming up from the sea. The dew-pond is a tavern for all the birds of the neighbouring plains and valleys, for the meadow-pipits of the precipitous face of the hills, swifts and swallows of the villages at the foot, and birds of passage, far-flying rook, crow, or hawk. To lie in ambush in a little trench beside the pond, on a cushion of thyme, is to see an endless procession of birds coming to quench their thirsts, and to hear all the afternoon the melodious grace-offerings of the linnets, before and after drinking. They are the tavern's most constant habitués.

Up the old hills at this point comes a long line of telegraph-poles, the black, branchless trees marching away towards the sea till lost in far distance. Unwarrantable as their intrusion seems, in these lovely wilds, yet the downs have made them their own. They stand out as gaunt as

gibbets; from the village below the three on the hill-crest suggest a Calvary. The wind whistles through their wires in mighty harmony, making a background to the music native to these solitudes, bleat of sheep, tinkle of sheep-bell, drone of humble-bee, chirrup of grasshopper, and song of skylark, with now and then a monotonous chant from a soaring pipit, and all through the afternoon the twittering of the linnets as they come to sip the heavenly dew.

In the early afternoon a flock of sheep drift to the water, and wade in till shoulder deep, drinking their fill, then slowly drift away, accompanied the while by their faithful allies, the starlings, perched on their backs, or running between their legs to drink themselves. The last sheep drinks (one, as it happens, who should be leader, having a clanking bell) and hurries up the pond's bank, standing a moment, bleating and sniffing the air, as if afraid to be lost, then making at a trot after the others, now grazing far along the ridge. The pond is left again to the linnets.

They come darting in, in twos and threes, or in little parties of five or six, almost without ceasing,

the livelong afternoon. A score may be drinking together. Their coming is always heralded by the eager, most musical linnet twitter. Tripping down the side of the basin, they sip at the pond's edge from the small vantage-points left by the sheep's feet-marks, or from among the pond-weeds. After drinking, they go in deeper, to splash and bathe, in a few minutes to rise into the wind, hover a moment, and, with a lightning turn, flash away down wind to the valley. And never does linnet leave the Sign of the Dew-pond without offering up its note of thanksgiving.

The linnets come up fearlessly, drink and depart, until hundreds have been refreshed; others approach more shyly. There comes a timid turtle-dove, that circles many times before settling, then warily pecks about on the grass before daring to take the few sips it craves. A rook drops down to stand motionless, save for its ever-turning head, for three minutes, before waddling to water. Meadow-pipits, being of soaring habits, hover and flutter above the surface. The swifts, circling overhead, swoop to take but one sip on the wing; swallows skim the

surface, and sometimes even dive. The shepherd says he has more swallows to keep him company, as they hawk for insects disturbed by his sheep's feet, on a dull day than on a sunny one, for the insects tend to keep in hiding, and the birds gather where they are disturbed by the sheep. An unusual aspect of swallows is gained from the Beacon, as you look down the precipitous side of the hill, and from above watch them flashing up to the pond, then, with one beat of the wings, swooping to the plain nearly a thousand feet below, twisting, rising, and diving for hours.

A flock of young starlings make a rare commotion as they settle to drink and bathe, and the birds leave the water as woefully bedraggled objects. A few familiar birds of gardens, which have taken to the life of hermits in the solitudes of the downs, are seen, robins, thrushes, and black-birds calling for their drinks with yellowhammers, stonechats, and the more typical hill-birds. Most at home of all the birds are the dainty water-wagtails, dancing lightly over the rough, sheep-trodden clay of the pond's margin. The company

of the birds is joined by a few butterflies, that flicker waywardly above the water. At night come other thirsty customers to the tavern, and one that is sure to come is the fox of the gorses of the next valley.

Rich as is our countryside in types of lanes—Essex lanes like Dutch pictures, hollow Sussex lanes running through the oak-woods, Warwickshire lanes with their grassy verges—no type perhaps is more famous than Devon's. So narrow are some of the lanes, so dense and luxuriant the grasses and ferns, flowers and brambles, that the plants of one side stretch out and touch those of the other, clutching at you as you brush your way through. Each one is a fitting setting for the romance which steepes Devon, and is signified by the very word.

A DEVON lane, says a song of Devon, is much like marriage. The way is long, and once you are in it, "It holds you as fast as a cage does a linnet": there is no turning back, forward you must go. Then the lane is so narrow that two may hardly ride abreast without a deal of "pother," and there is all the more pother if three try to go along together. But there are also

flowery banks, richly besprent with bud, blossom, and berry. One might add, to round the quaint argument, that Devon's lanes, as they wind betwixt ferny banks, and under branches which meet and mingle overhead, are full of romance and adventure. It adds to the charm of wandering about them not to know whither they run, or what fresh vista of sea or land, what deep and dark ravine, or orchard full of golden apples, or pleasant green pasture or red plough-field, will be found round the next bend. There is always something new round the corner.

Yes, and every step down these little old, deep lanes brings its new picture, one often viewed through a frame of overhanging tree-branches. One wonders how it came about that the lanes are so deep and high, so absurdly narrow, so that the red cows as a matter of course fall into single file as they come from pasture. What was the underlying thought of the road-maker who built first a rocky foundation, on top of that a steep turf bank or stone hedge, and set a dense living hedge growing on top of all, so that you must climb twenty feet or more to look out of the lane? No

lanes run so persistently up and down hill. The old road-makers seem to have let them run as they would, never seeking an easy way. Even the great high roads of the county follow ancient pack-horse courses over hill and dale, when often they might run on level ground. It is as well that the lanes should have their way, and climb hills to fall and climb again, and so remain the narrowest, most tortuous, most hilly, and sweetest lanes in the world.

As one goes down the lane in late summer, the way is perhaps blocked by an old man with a cart bringing home a fragrant load of bracken. To allow a solitary wayfarer to pass, he must needs back into the hedge, with plenty of "pother," but he always seems pleased to take the trouble, and always gives a pleasant greeting. (One wonders what would happen if two carts were to meet.) The never-failing greeting is a bit of old-world courtesy fast dying out elsewhere. And little Devon-lasses still drop curtsies in Devon lanes. Seeing any rustic maid picking primroses, wild roses or blackberries, if you look for the curtsy, and it should not come, by talking, or giving away

pennies or sweets, it always comes in the end. The little girls cannot know how much they add to the charm of the lanes by their bobbings. We are grateful to each blackberry-smeared maid who drops a curtsy, as she carries on a great tradition of Devon kindness.

The ferns are the wonder and the glory of the lanes, in spite of vandals who dig them up, people who for this crime against lovers of a lane surely deserve to be set in the stocks in Ottery St. Mary's churchyard. A history of Devon says that much of the robbery has been committed "by young ladies and curates." It seems that they have devastated the lanes so that they might sell hampers of the ferns, for the eking out of slender incomes. The curates' bishops should have taken action. Once in Devon there grew wild the noble Royal Fern, largest and most handsome of all native ferns, rearing itself to a height of eight feet and more; the young ladies of Devon, and the curates, know its fate. But three or four kinds of fern grow in every little lane, with the graceful bracken waving high over all: the lady fern, hardy and beautiful, accompanied by the male

fern; polypody, distinct and elegant, and the long, narrow hart's-tongues, green and glossy.

Down between the high ferny banks the lane runs to water. At the ford, where the stream babbles over flat stepping-stones, two typical Devon birds are likely to be seen; the handsome, white-bibbed dippers, for ever curtsying, like the little girls, as they run about the stones, and under the water, seeking their prey, and grey wag-tails flirting their long tails, and showing off their canary-hued breasts with the black velvet gorgets—graceful in every motion, they are like careless spirits of the stream. And the kingfishers flash along above the water. An otter may be seen, on a lucky day, at the ford, or at least its trail. It is one of the great charms of the Devon lane that one always seems within sound of running water.

As summer rises to its height, the rich colours of the land and the lane grow richer daily. On one side of the lane may tower up a wild hillside, glorious with the purple and gold of heather and gorse, while far below on the other side may be a deep ravine, glowing with the old gold of

bracken. It is a land of colour, of red earth and red cows, with never one patched with white; there are red cliffs, and red banks to the lanes; grey sea-cliffs and precipices and grey walls; wine-coloured seas, seas of turquoise blue, seas of purple heather on the cliff-tops, and grey granite rocks covered by orange lichens; acre upon acre of yellow and golden corn; while away in the distance rises the long purple line of Dartmoor. And it is a land of stone. Devon stiles are of stone, and the gates are hinged and latched on to pillars of stone. Flat slabs are set on the thatch of stacks in windy places, and flat stones pave many of the lanes: stones are everywhere.

Down in the hollows, surrounded by apple-orchards, laden with those sour apples which yield the good Devon cider, nestle the old farm-houses, seemingly as old and quiet as the hills. Each one makes a picture, with its old, grey stones, and the cool, white interior, the garden, a riot of flower-colours, and farm-buildings with some such typical picture as that of three old horses toiling and moiling round and round, turning the shaft which turns the wheels which

cut the chaff. The old farms seem peaceful and sleepy, as they snugly nestle in their sheltered hollows. Small wonder that the men of Devon are slow people, or seem slow to a Cockney pilgrim, who discovers Devon as a land of afternoon.

If an excuse can be found for entering one of the great old farmhouses, many pleasant things are to be seen, and good things to be tasted. A cup of cider never comes amiss, and who shall sing the praises of Devonshire cream? Much choice old furniture and china, old fire-irons and oak panellings, remain in the cottages, in spite of the dealers, for the cottagers do not part lightly with their gods.

Devon folk are proud, and have much to be proud of—coombe and tor, cove and hoe, Hawkins, Raleigh, and Drake, their orchards and their cider, their cream and their nut-brown lasses; but to a lover of lanes it is perhaps the little, deep, winding, leafy lane of the land that holds his heart most securely. The ghost of the lover of lanes surely will hardly be content to haunt any others. There is romance in each one, and you feel it about you as you loiter along

among the orchards on some dreamy midsummer afternoon, when all the farms look asleep. The very word Devon means romance, if it be true that it comes from the Celtic word signifying "dark and deep valleys."

If advice were sought on how to enjoy a walk in a wood, the golden counsel would be, neither to walk nor to talk, but to keep very still and quiet ; for he who walks in a wood is likely enough to see nothing but trees. To lie in an ambush is the way to bring the birds all about you, to interest the squirrel, so that he comes head-first down a tree-trunk to investigate you, and to have (if you please) the woodmice running over your feet. And the place of places in the woods, for the study of their wild-life, is beside the brook or pond.

WHERE a wavy old bridge crosses the forest brook is a ford ; here the cows come gratefully on a hot afternoon on their way, at milking-time, from their rough pasture to the forest farm, and over their heads old oaks form a canopy of golden-green. In mid-May there are primroses all along the banks, while in the forest the beech-stems rise from seas of bluebells. On one side of the

ford is a rough, heathery bit of common, with rushy patches where snipe nest, and on the other side is a meadow invaded by bluebells from the woods, giving the grass, with its cloth of buttercup-gold, a violet border. At the north end of the meadow every bent bluebell-head faces the south and the sun.

All the wild life of the neighbouring woodlands drifts to the brook, and the sand of the banks holds the record of wandering feet. Leading to the ford is the clear trail of deer, never to be mistaken, and always thrilling, especially when unexpectedly hit upon in a Sussex wild. Often a glimpse is caught of shadowy deer forms bounding through the bracken. Along the banks are the trails of rats and water-voles, and the voles constantly hold the eye in the stream as they swim with their fur silvery with entangled air. Stoats come often to the water, and the fox that springs on the sitting pheasant here washes away the stain of his kill. The brook has carved many little bays in the wood, and above its banks are smooth, grassy lawns beneath the oaks, the turf kept short and fine by rabbits. Squirrels delight to frisk on

these lawns, and store nuts in the pockets of the trees' roots. One tree is a favourite with fox cubs, that chase each other round its stem, wearing the moss.

Where a strip of the forest runs to a corner by the stream, a gamekeeper has set a tunnel-trap of the humane kind—if a trap may be humane—which catches its victims alive. In this keeper's experience, if a squirrel frisks unawares into the delusive box, and finds himself prisoner, he will die within an hour or two of broken heart. Hedgehogs are commonly taken. To-day there is an innocent rabbit, no bigger than a fist. Released, he plunges headlong down the bank into the stream, swimming bravely to the far shore of what must be to him a very Mississippi.

All along the forest stream the shy warblers are to be seen. The nightingale has a marked love for water among trees. From every tree, it seems, the little melodies of the willow-wrens are spilt all day, as they keep an eye on their choice nests, pockets of feathers with mossy domes. Chiff-chaffs call their own names wherever one wanders, and now and then the trilling of the rare wood-

warbler comes from a high tree-top, as he flutters in short flights from tree to tree, trilling as he goes. The wood-wild notes of the blackcap vie with the nightingale's. In the heart of a great clump of wild-rose is the garden-warbler's secret.

There are nests all down the stream; high in holes in trees—nuthatches' and woodpeckers'; low in old stumps—tits' and wrens'; in overhanging briers, brambles, and hawthorns; in the banks; amid old bracken and brushwood. Sitting pheasants only reveal themselves when rising from underfoot, and many a robin braves all dangers, from rats, snakes, weasels, jays and magpies, by nesting in the open on the ground. Each old yew beside the brook shelters birds' secrets; gold-crests swing dainty cradles beneath the tips of branches, chaffinches love a yew, and blackbirds, missel- and song-thrushes. One old tree often harbours several nests. On the brink of the stream a wild duck sits so closely that you may stand within a yard to note how perfectly she blends with her surroundings. If put off, she flutters to water, the green bars of her wings showing for a moment; but if she goes off of her own

accord, she first covers and hides the eggs with dead leaves. The whereabouts of her mate, the drake, is his secret, he having deserted her, after seeing her safely settled on the nest, to undergo his annual eclipse, and shed his fine feathers.

It is enchanted ground, all along the forest brook, with its manifold secrets.

Opinions differ strangely as to which month of the year is most enjoyable, but many agree that August is one of the least lovable months, summer having lost its freshness, and most of the birds having fallen silent. The woods seem asleep. But there is the everlasting joy of harvest, and the cornfields have endless pictures to offer. They have their own music, and their own birds—the corn-bunting; animals—the harvest-mouse; and insects—the peacock or harvest butterfly. The reapers tear the golden veil from all the secrets of the creatures which have found in the corn a summer paradise. Harvest-home has been shorn of its glory, but is a festival still.

FROM seed-time to harvest the cornfield gives food and shelter to a multitude of wild creatures, as thick as motes in sunbeams. Man takes the corn for bread, but his benefit is small beside the good gifts yielded by the field to bird, animal, and insect. An almost perfect sanctuary is provided

to hosts of creatures that elect to spend the summer in the jungle of the corn-stems.

The field supports its own birds at all seasons. In winter, gulls and rooks follow the plough, the white-winged gulls like so many angels among imps of darkness. With the dawn of spring comes the barley-bird—yellow wagtail—to the cornfield from overseas, to the self-same field, no doubt, where he was reared, or reared his young, the year before, his summer home, it may be, for ten or twenty years. The green plovers then begin to court and nest, and soar, dive, wheel and wail above the field by night as by day. The field has its own troupe of minstrels, with the lark as chieftain, with the corn-bunting to sing his lazy song, and yellowhammers in the hedges. Hawks come to prey on the flocks of finches and sparrows. But the pheasant and partridge broods are safer in the corn than anywhere from a hawk's eye: the field is a very paradise for game-birds. What the corn hides is hidden as by an inscrutable veil until harvest. The hare, at heart a nocturnal animal, may pass the summer in the corn, rearing litter after litter, and avoid all notice from the

farmer in her wonderfully secretive life. The farmer knows there are rabbits, seeing how they attack the green wheat, but must wait for revenge until they are evicted by the reaper. He may see where badgers have rolled the corn flat, or suspect that a family of fox cubs is making a playground of a scanty patch in mid-field; but he does not see the moles tunnelling among the roots of the corn, the sly little weasels that travel in the mole-runs, the harvest-mouse which weaves her cradle among the stems, other mice and shrews in multitudes, hedgehogs which come to the corn from the ditches, rats, or the stoats which know the cornfield as a hunter's Elysium. Even the gamekeeper does not know what the corn shelters, catching only glimpses of the partridge broods as they go for their dust-baths in the early morning to roads near the field, or to neighbouring fallows, or when, in showery summer weather, they come into the open from the corn to dry themselves. No man sees what the corn hides, and from man, at least, the field's inhabitants are safe, until the day of reaping.

Fox cubs delight in play, in romping round a

favourite tree-trunk in the woods, and in hide-and-seek in the corn-stems. Golden hours they must have in the wheatfields in the height of summer, with no enemy to be feared, and food to be picked up on all sides. The cubs may begin hunting by teasing and mouthing the moles they find in their runs, or pouncing on the young rabbits—"starters," the keeper calls them. A family will pass the summer in the corn, and may never be seen by mortal eye. Myriads of rabbits, opening their eyes on the world, see nothing but corn. A doe will often make her nursery "stop" a few yards from the cornfield's hedge, but if vermin abound the life is precarious. Badgers like nothing better for dinner than tender baby rabbits, and they are at the mercy of such stoats, weasels and foxes as the corn may harbour. But there are always rabbits, and often hundreds in a field, when the reaping-machine begins its work. Scared by the rattle of it, they crowd to mid-field, a seething mass of fur, and when at last they bolt they make lively sport, if sport it can be called, for the field labourers, who pursue them with sticks, staves, and stones, and frenzied view-halloas. The fox steals

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away as the reaper comes into the field, though a cub may grow bewildered, and only dash for freedom at the last moment, pursued by execrating howls from the harvesters. The gamekeeper's heart rejoices as he sees covey after covey set sail. They will come back to the stubbles in the quiet of the evening, and their melancholy calling will be heard among the stooks. Parent pheasants work their broods back from the corn to the place where they were reared, coming again to the stubbles for fallen grain when the fields are at peace after harvesting.

Many pictures of wild life would the corn show, if we could pierce the golden veil—the fox cubs at play, young badgers following their parents at evening twilight, one behind the other, on hunting forays, sleek little leverets learning to race and leap, or the devoted partridge parents brooding their chicks. We rarely have the chance to approach partridge broods closely enough to watch them while they feed, and hear the notes they then utter, curious and unfamiliar conversational asides; to see how they luxuriate in their dust-baths, or watch that strange performance,

the dance of the partridges, with two birds running in a circle in opposite ways, bowing and scraping when they meet. Young partridges run and dance and call in play almost like a happy family of cubs or children. The veil of the corn lies over all the jolly, callow days of the brood, and when rent asunder, it reveals the chicks of mid-summer as nearly full-grown—sporting birds ready to face the guns, birds that have made the most of a life foredoomed, perhaps, to be no more than twelve weeks long.

And then there is one of the prettiest pictures of the harvest-field—the sight of the midget red harvest-mouse, sitting on an ear of corn to garner the ripe grain; and we may chance to find its nest, woven of blades of wheat among the stems almost with the cunning of a bird, a ball to which there is no official front door, wherein the mother brings up family after family of naked young. This is a day mouse, and the corn is beset by its enemies: it is lucky to be carried in the sheaves to the stack, where it may spend the winter.

In spite of the passing of the sickle and scythe, and of women gleaners and child workers in the

field, the harvest pictures keep their old charm, and emphasise again the patience and enduring strength of our peasants, as they follow the reaper, pitch the sheaves, build the stacks, and thatch in the heat and burden of the dog-days. Old men with long memories note one great change in the comparatively few hands now employed in the fields. In old-time farming, labour was cheap, and the farmer could afford to pay for all the men needed, and a good farmer would be judged by the number of his men: until about the mid-days of the last century wages were about 8s. 6d. a week. The farmer could afford four or five ploughings for corn, and gangs of boys to pick weeds. Another change is that there is no corn for the gleaners. Farmers gave the corn as an act of grace; a man with a flail would thresh it for poor neighbours, and the miller would oblige by grinding it, and then the bread the women baked in their old-fashioned cottage ovens was bread indeed.

The old, musical sounds of the harvest-field are not yet all banished, the sing-song cries of warning when horses are about to move forward,

the ring of the whetstone ; but the feast of harvest-home in the farmer's barn is almost extinct, as also the ceremony of the harvest-load, when, "crowned with boughs, the last load quits the field." Bloomfield, the Suffolk poet, told of the feast "For all that clear'd the crop, or till'd the ground," guests by right of custom. The memory of it would last a year. And after the victuals, a drinking horn would be passed round, and for four or five hours the company would drink, each man in turn, while the rest sang a harvest song with the strange burden, "Drink up yur liquor, and turn yur cup over, and over and over and over and over." The master's health was drunk with a will—

Here's a health unto our Master, the founder of the
feast,

I wish with all me heart, sir, your soul in heaven may
rest—

and the mistress'—"This is our mistress' health, merrily singing"—and then some old song would be started, such as that telling how Satan came and carried off the farmer's wife, upon which the farmer said joyfully, "You're welcome, good

Satan, with all my heart"—with a whistling chorus to the tune of "Lillibulero." But in these days, when the last load is carried—marking the greatest moment in the story of the year of the farm—the waggon goes its way in silence. The old ship of the fields might be taking a corpse to the burying—as it has done many times before now.

Another forgotten Sussex custom was called "The Hollering Pot." At the end of harvest, the labourers would assemble in the evening, and chant this ditty, all standing in a ring :

We've plough'd, we've sow'd, we've reap'd, we've mow'd,
We've carried the last load, and ne'er overthrow'd—

Hip, Hip, Harvest Home !

Each man then was served with a pint of strong beer—those were the good old days ! The custom was omitted if a load had been upset, or anything else had gone amiss. The old songs die out, as harvesting may some day die out in our land. It is comforting to look out from some high down over a far-spread weald below, and mark the leagues of gold and brown cornfields among the green meadows and the dark green woods, and

watch again the wind-ripples passing over the crops, and see the old pictures where the sheaves are being set in orderly ranks. These are pictures, if vanishing, bound up with the genius of our race. And it is pleasant to think of the days when labour went merrily to the tune of song and dance. We have another picture of them in a quaint work, "The Twelve Moneths," written in the high days following the Restoration, 1661 :

"The furmenty-pot welcomes home the harvest-cart, and the garland of flowers crowns the captain of the reapers; the battle of the field is now stoutly fought. The pipe and the tabor are now busily set a-work; and the lad and the lass will have no lead on their heels. O 'tis the merry time wherein honest neighbours make good cheer, and God is glorified in his blessings on the earth."

Lonely old forgotten lanes are always places of enchantment—paradises for birds. Along the grass-grown sections of Stane Street, that straight Roman way from London to Chichester, nothing passes in a week but rabbit or stoat—or the ghosts of Roman charioteers. Those who follow the Canterbury Pilgrims through Surrey, coming over the hills from Guildford along the Way, go by yew-shaded tracks, rustic lanes and field-paths, and may meet only a few field-workers in a day's march; and so along portions of the old Icknield Way, from East Anglia to Cornwall. Autumn comes here early, and lingers on a long time, and in September every step down the green track, between the high tangled hedges, has its new interest in flower, bird, or berry.

EARLY in September, Autumn's presence begins to be felt, nowhere perhaps more nearly than in the quiet of an old green lane, such as the hedge-bound stretches of the Icknield Way—that old pilgrims' way from the West Country to East

Anglia—as it runs below the western slopes of the Chilterns. Where it passes below the great chalk cross cut out on the Whiteleaf hill, a landmark to pilgrims through the ages, such luxuriant bowers of wild clematis are found as may have suggested the name, Traveller's Joy, given from its “decking and adorning waies and hedges where people travel.” Gerarde called it “Virgin's Bower,” in compliment to the Virgin Queen, and it would be a bower well worthy of a queen where it towers twenty feet high, a luxuriant mass of bright green leaves and creamy flowers. It is still a flower of summer; but “summer goes on swallow's wings,” and the flowers give way to the feathery seeds called “Old-man's-beard.” To go down the old lane on “The First,” is to see where Autumn has stealthily gone before, laying here and there, in Tennyson's phrase, “a fiery finger on the leaves.”

The lane is bordered by tapestries of flowers in Autumn's colours, purple, blue, and gold, a riot of scabious, knapweed, and ragwort. It seems rather strange that so charming a flower as scabious, which grows so profusely on the chalky

downs, and is so appealing, with its lilac blooms, should have been hymned so little by our poets : one of the loveliest of our wildings, it is like moschatel (*Adoxa*) " Without glory." This perhaps is because it has been burdened by a cruel name, though meant well, as enshrining the idea that it cured leprosy. Country children speak of it as Bluecap, and a rustic name of the West Country would surely have made it a poet's flower, if widely known—Gypsy Rose. With its somewhat swarthy look, it must charm all who wander, gypsy-like, about the chalk hills with early Autumn.

Looking up from the lane to the beech-clad hills, wherever a bush of dogwood grows on their side Autumn has lighted a fire, and already the beeches are turning to gold, bronze, and copper hues. All down the lane there are flaming dogwoods which merit the adjective of their specific name, " sanguinea "; the stems are crimson, and the green leaves of summer are of a full crimson tone, like tongues of fire in the sun. Autumn's finger is touching the hedge-maples too, turning the leaves lemon and orange, little trees

to which we owe a great debt for autumn tints. The hedge-fruits begin to ripen : " *Ferat rubus asper amomum.*" Pheasants from the woodlands will soon be straying down the lane after Autumn, in quest of blackberries. The first ripe blackberries of September recall to some of us old days when, for love of nature and hope of adventure, we played truant in wild tangled lanes, making a day of it in blackberry-hunting : and we may recall Cowper's lines about himself as a boy on such a truant holiday, hungry, penniless, far from home, feeding on hips and haws, crabs, brambleberries, and even sloes. The bramble gives bountifully, but levies a tax on passers-by having woolly coats, and goldfinches resort gratefully to the magazines of wool thus providentially provided. The wool on the brambles, in our fathers' day, presented a last sad resort to many a poor old country woman, who gathered it through autumn and winter, to spin it into sixpenny mops : Clare, the Northamptonshire peasant-poet, has told the story in his homely strains. The mop-maker's goodman would cut the flexible bramble-stems as binders for his

thatching, and in the end some of the stems he had garnered might serve to bind down the turf of his grave.

At every few steps the flask-shaped berries of the wayfaring-tree take the eye. Their greyish-green leaves of summer change their Quaker-like garb for one of rich crimson, and the green berries turn to a strong, glossy red, on their way to becoming purple-black, each cluster showing varying tints, coral, ruby, and jet. The tree may have been named "wayfaring" from its green foliage suggesting a dust-stained traveller, or perhaps from the pleasure its gay berries give to all who take the pilgrims' way along the hills, as summer yields to autumn.

Flat clusters of elderberries on their wine-hued stalks begin to turn purple-black for the delight of starlings. We may recall the elderberry-wine of the old-fashioned farmhouse—no mean vintage, and the old-time farmer's favourite nightcap. Some of our grandmothers knew the use of the berries as a strong dye for grey hairs. And Autumn's finger has touched the green, urn-shaped hips of the briars, wherein sleep the roses

of Junes unborn. When turned to their full colour these will be to the taste of the greenfinches. Our grandmothers would beat the hips of roses, and the haws of may-bushes, to a pulp, for the making of conserves, for as Gerarde said, "The fruit maketh most pleasant meats and banqueting dishes, and such-like." On some of the briers we note the moss-like growth called bedeguar, the uncanny outcome of a prick by the ovipositor of a minute gall-fly, each mossy ball housing its two or three dozen grubs, in their separate cells.

Autumn now begins to conspire with the sun, to plump the hazel-nuts with sweet kernels. The man who leaves them for the squirrels, the dormice, the great tits, and the nuthatches may—who knows?—earn as well as deserve their blessings. Shakespeare knew Queen Mab's need of nuts for her chariot, as "Made by the joiner squirrel, or old grub." Omens are still drawn from the nut-harvest, as they were by the Romans, who would burn hazel-torches on the evenings of marriage feasts, with a symbolical notion of kindling fires of love. Countrymen hold that a good nut-crop and a good corn-harvest go together, and a good

crop of partridges. In medicine, if we may believe the herbalist, Culpeper, hazel-nuts are good for curing coughs, in spite of an idea that nuts with wine tend to produce coughs. "Are men's tongues," he demanded wrathfully, "so given to slandering one another that they must slander nuts too to keep their tongues in use?" And John Evelyn declared that hazel-nuts would go to make as good a pudding as any which our ladies can make of almonds.

There are still whitethroats in the hedges of the old green lane, to scold the pilgrims as of old. But it is rather the melancholy calling of the partridges in the stubbles crossed by the lane that strikes the seasonable note from "The First" onwards, and, more than all, the new-found voice of the robin, making music that will follow Autumn's every step down the lane.

A quiet countryside has not much to offer a wayfarer, seeking enjoyment, in the way of Arcadian festivals, but most rural districts have their agricultural associations, holding shows in autumn, which provide amusing studies of rural life in many phases. One feature is the ploughing-match, which brings ploughmen into unwonted competition and company, and makes a novel sort of entertainment to any onlooker whose lot in life has not been cast among field-workers. The sight of twenty puissant teams of horses in competition in one field makes a rare picture; while each ploughman's anxiety to turn the straight furrow, and the illuminating comments of the judges and the onlookers as the work goes on, have their humorous aspects, the whole making a diverting study, alike in human and equine nature.

THE sun has hardly banished hyacinthine mists, wreathing in those deep valleys of the Sussex Weald which might have been carved by a Titan's

plough, before the ploughing-match is under weigh. Twenty teams have heard the old words, "Gee-oop!"—now are leaning to the drag of the plough, and every man behind a plough, as he throws his weight on one handle or another, has his whole being, body and soul, set on one idea—the straight furrow. It is nine o'clock of a fine October morning, the sky radiant, the warmth after a cold night so genial that a thrush is inspired to utter a few phrases of his spring song. Overhead, the larks are in an ecstasy; and before any of the twenty teams has completed the first long furrow, wagtails are running nimbly about the upturned clods, dancing about as if the field were as smooth as ice, as the gleaming shares upturn their breakfast.

The new straight furrows, against the light of the sun, glitter like gold. The hedges round the stubble glow in richest October livery. All the teams are gaily caparisoned, red ribbons fluttering; some carry tinkling bells on their heads, and the sun glints on the brass ornaments of the harness. There is a feeling of holiday in the air. In a meadow near by are tents for the display of

mangolds and swedes, flags flying; and there is a booth flowing with beer. But there is an impressiveness also about the scene. "Thank God we have a few ploughmen left," the old Squire is heard to remark; and his words recall those of a greater philosopher, how we may talk as we please of lions rampant and eagles in field d'or or d'argent, but a plough in a field arable is the most noble and ancient of arms.

Larks sing above the ploughs, but their notes are drowned in the cries of the ploughmen, urging on their honest slaves. The horses know the language of the plough as well as any Christian: "Turn to'ard, you!" "Come hither, you!"—"Whoo-a; Wey-a—Who-ut—Pull-oop!" (So, in the old days, the Sussex oxen knew such guttural sounds as may be rendered by "Mothawoot," and "Yahawoot," for come hither, or go thither.) The names of the horses are shouted with the addition of a broad "a" to each one—"Captain-a—Steam-a—Duke-a—Daisy-a!"—a medley of cries. An old farmer is put in mind of a good story. Away back in the 'eighties, shiploads of French horses were brought to England,

and he bought one pair. Going out to the fields to see how they worked, he found his carter in a state of perplexity. "Dammit," said he, "they doan't know what I talks to them." Another farmer remarks on the great changes which have come over the farm in his time, and how the labourers have changed with their work, now so much lighter than of old; he doubts if the men of to-day could do their fathers' work. Ploughing with the old-fashioned wooden plough was something like work; it was as much as a man could do to keep it from falling over, and if it fell, it was beyond a boy's strength to set it right. He has a story of an amazing sight he once saw on his own farm: four two-horse teams ploughing a field, as it seemed, of their own accord. The four carters who should have been at the plough-tails stood in idleness, watching the horses at work, and waiting to turn the ploughs when the furrows were finished. The men had wagered on their horses' power to plough unaided. The farmer was so well pleased with the perfect training of his horses that the men escaped a severely threatening storm.

Back and forth go the ploughs, the long morning through; and back and forth flies rustic wit at the expense of the ploughmen. "How be you gettin' on?" is the common form of greeting, to which the answer is ever the same, the expressive word, "Middlin'." A Sussex man knows by the tone of the word the precise degree of its meaning. "Middlin', I can tell ye!" would imply that the ploughing goes famously. "Purty middlin'" would mean it goes but tolerably. Uttered in a doleful tone, the word middling may be taken to mean lamentably—"larmentaably"—bad. The way the carters handle their ploughs, and the way they walk, make curious studies. This one is over-anxious: his team is spirited, and he crouches over the plough like the figure of a charioteer, half running in his eagerness. One old fellow is so bowed in the legs that he walks with both feet in the furrow. Another leans like a sloping tree. Some make hard work of the ploughing, while others, when once their ploughs have been set true, seem merely to be following, not guiding. "He takes it easy," remarks a farmer's wife of one lounging form. "Ay," answers a veteran

carter, "you wants to take it easy, ploughin'." Each competitor has a half-acre to plough, and this alone means a march of five long miles.

It is a matter of common remark that a good ploughman may lose his nerve in the stress of such unwonted excitement as the ploughing-match. One who at home, on familiar land, ploughs furrows as straight as gun-barrels can now do no better than to plough a long series of the letter "S." "A bit foggy this marnin', Jim?" calls out a Job's comforter of a passer-by, as the distressful Jim, leaning a moment on the plough-handle, ruefully surveys his work. "'Tis the folk lookin' on what puts you in a fog," he answers. "I reckon that yonder's the worst furrow that ever I did plough." His wife, whose face is thin and fierce, now comes alongside, children clinging; and her look as she surveys her goodman's furrows does nothing to give him heart of grace. A farmer, one of the judges, passes with a wry glance at the work, to pause in admiration where the next man's piece begins: "*That's* better," he exclaims loudly, regardless of hurt feelings: then, addressing the ploughman, "Heads pulled too

close together, George," he shouts. "You allus wants to see between your horses," remarks the veteran carter, adding, in tones of deepest pessimism, "'Tain't good ploughin'—'tain't none of it good ploughin'." But the Squire, when the time comes for speech-making and prize-giving, seems well pleased with the work. He tells a story of his father, who once found some fault with a man's ploughing, to be answered by the taunt, "You'd best do it yourself," and how the old gentleman answered, "Stand by," and ploughed a couple of furrows as straight and clean as you please. From the platform of a farm-waggon, the Squire and his good lady dispense prizes and smiles among all the honest competitors. There is a prize even for the distressful carter of the crooked furrows, and his fierce-faced wife takes home the two pounds intact in her purse.

Autumn is held to be a melancholy time : “ ’Tis a dull sight,” sighs the poet, “ to see the year dying.” It is the time, as he holds, to retire to an old room, and pile the bright fire. But in the eyes of many the countryside is never more enjoyable than on sunshiny and mellow October days, and later, when the last leaves are being routed. With the downfall of summer sets in a revival of bird-song : the pilgrims’ way is set to music. The swallows go : but the fieldfares come in. Especially enjoyable are the evening concerts given by the congregations of starlings, and of linnets and others ; while the evening babel from the rookery was well described by White of Selborne as “ very engaging to the imagination.”

ROSES, in Devon gardens, bloom in honour of St. Martin, and his little summer. Primroses, in Sussex shaws, tell tales of spring among the dead leaves. Wallflowers bloom anew in cottage gardens, and second crops of honeysuckle breathe

of June. The rich, rustling, red-brown carpet grows thicker daily on the floor of the beechen hanger, and only shreds and tatters of the canopy are left, but they shine like guinea-gold in sunlight. In a lane, with deep bronze drifts of fallen beech-leaves, the perfecting touch of the colour-scheme is given by the presence of three or four swaggering pheasants hunting for beechmast, with their glittering emerald necks and bejewelled breasts. The richest effect of the last leaves is found by a sheltered forest pool, the quiet haunt of a heron, when the trees are lighted by the evening sun. Gold and silver of birches, bronze of bracken, brown of Spanish chestnut, fiery reds of cherries, the russet of oaks and the greenery of pines are all reflected in the pool's mirror, the colours blending and blurred. There is one bush or tree to which much of the beauty of autumn tints is due, though not a famous tree, and little noticed at other seasons—the humble hedge-maple, with its prettily-cut leaves that take on every autumnal tone from palest lemon through a gamut of shades to orange.

The deep quietness of November woods is

broken by occasional alarums, as when a flock of wood-pigeons crashes from the beeches, sending the squirrels scampering in alarm, and setting the jays screeching, or when a vigilant wren suddenly breaks a deep silence by scolding a stoat. The flute-like whistle of the nuthatch rings out, and tinkling notes are showered from the trees as a rover band of titmice drifts by. Mid-November has its music, in echoes of spring and dirges of autumn. Thrushes sing in a retrospective way. The robin's pensive song is a dirge for the summer that has flown on swallows' wings. A deliberate singer, he seems to be pleasing himself with his various airs, dwelling fondly on long-drawn notes, and repeating favourite passages. His offspring begin to rival him as minstrels, as their waistcoats take on the true robin red. He is always a great lover of a quiet covert-side, as those know who have occasion to wait silently for pheasants, or for a cub to break covert in the dewy dawn. As dusk falls, the pheasants go to roost, and the woods ring with the ritual of their vespers. Young cocks now feel their self-importance, and lustily answer the

challenges of the old birds. For twenty minutes the hush of the still autumn evenings is broken by the babel of the pheasants' evensong. The strange "cocketing" as the birds flutter into the branches has a wildness that seems to belong to the primeval forest.

Some of the most taking autumn pictures are miniature landscapes, like a few yards of chalk lane under old chalk hills, with a roadside copse of hedge-maple in brown and gold, and one flaming cherry-tree. All the colours of the year's sunset are in the bramble-leaves, in crimson dogwood bushes, wine-hued leaves of wayfaring-trees, berries of briars and hawthorns, and the garlands of bryonies; in contrast is the silvery, feathery tangle of Old-man's-beard. Beyond the lane rise the hills, steeped in violet shadows as the sun sets behind them, and the shepherd leads his flock down their precipitous face to the fold below.

Autumn's golden afternoons are often intensely quiet, and the quietness is emphasised by the small sounds of the countryside, the melancholy calling of the partridges in the stubbles, the throaty

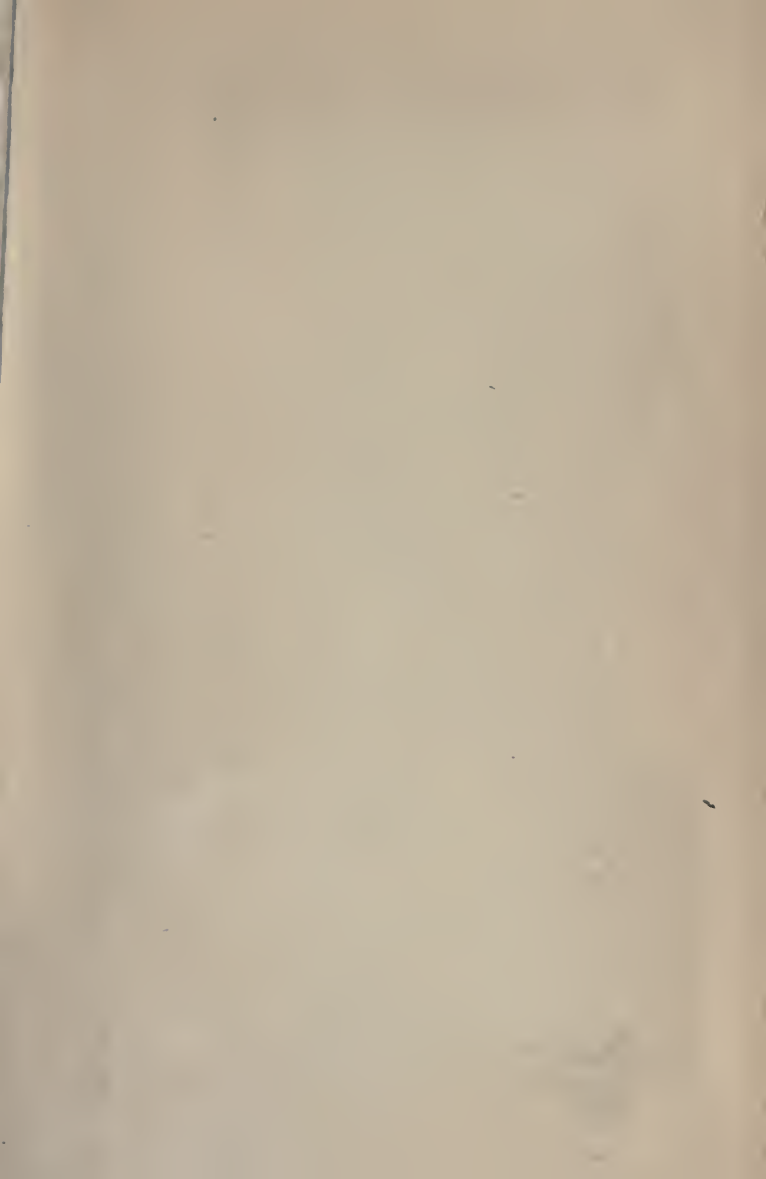
chuckles of fieldfares, the mellow cawing of rooks winging homewards, and the hyena-like laugh of the little owl. Or the exultant, laughing call of the green woodpecker breaks the silence, a cheerful note on a dull day, as he cuts a cheerful figure in his gay green coat and crimson cap; he is worthy of his name, Popinjay. Of the warblers that come to us for the summer the last to sing may be the little chiffchaff: its slender, olive-green form is often seen late in autumn still slipping about the vegetable garden. The echo of spring in its two notes carries the mind back to a windy March day when it was first heard as one of the truest spring heralds. The autumn song may be something of a curiosity, like a November primrose, but we must admire the merry heart which inspires this farewell performance.

“The rooks are blown about the skies” is a line which conjures a familiar bird-picture of autumn; and their mellow calling always seems in harmony with autumn’s golden light and last mellow leaves. Their beautiful evening evolutions about the roost-trees make another familiar autumn picture, and it is amid a babel of good-

night cries to the world that the flock at last settles for the night. The confused babel was compared by Gilbert White to the cry of a pack of hounds in echoing woods, and to a surging tide. As twilight deepens, strange incantations go up from the starling hosts. When in a pack of thousands they circle above the reed-beds the rush of their wings is like a roaring wind. A thousand, or ten thousand, fly as with but one pair of wings, and the chorus of their vespers makes an indescribable medley of whistling, chattering, beak-clicking and warbling notes, continued by the hour. One may catch imitations of many other birds, the spring call of the golden plover, the cry of the peewit, the whistle of the curlew, or the call of the thrush. Most mysterious of the evening concerts of autumn is the evensong of a flock of linnets. As the birds are densely clustered on one tree, busily engaged in making their toilets, a few begin musically to chirrup, and then the song passes like a wave through the whole flock, each bird singing as it listeth; and all the air is filled with the gushing flood of melody. Another pleasant evening concert, as the last

leaves fall, is given by those handsome winter bird-visitors, the bramblings, which consort with other finches, and are almost as pretty as chaffinches in their black, white, and buff tones, and with their orange-red breasts and white rumps; their lively twitterings as they settle to roost is like a benison on a day well spent. The lark is associated with dawn, but also will sing a complin, in autumn as in spring, as lovers of birds observed long ago: witness the antique lines:

The lerkis discendis from the skyis hicht
Singand hir compline song eftir hir gise
To tak hir rest, at matyne houre to rise.



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